Choice and decision-making in upper secondary education:
A comparative study of pupils' perspectives in England and Norway

Claire Louise Poppy

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Abstract

This is a comparative qualitative study of England and Norway concerned with pupils' perspectives of their experiences of decision-making in upper secondary education. The study is located within a socio-cultural perspective and, in particular, cultural historical activity theory. Furthermore, Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson's (1996) theory of *careership* has been adopted as a means of conceptualising the decision-making process, alongside Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* for understanding the position of the individual within society.

England and Norway were chosen as a result of their differing priorities in education. Ten institutions in two cities were involved in the study. From these, 270 pupils completed questionnaires, of which 68 were later interviewed. Most of these pupils were also contacted some time later to follow-up on their original plans. In addition to the pupils, 16 school representatives and guidance counsellors were interviewed.

In comparing England and Norway, it was apparent that pupils utilised the same types of decision-making. Their contextual setting, however, made for very different experiences. The selection process of the educational system played a significant part in creating these contexts. There was also some indication of inequality of access for pupils from lower socio-economic and ethnic-minority backgrounds. Furthermore, pupils' perceptions of whether the system provided them with real opportunities influenced their willingness to engage within the decision-making process. This was evident in the levels of dissatisfaction amongst the Norwegian pupils who appeared to experience a lack of choice and independence within the system. The English pupils tended to be better prepared for making decisions and to feel they could make active choices. Furthermore, support and assessment were key factors in both countries.

Policy-makers need to focus on the real decision-making processes involved when developing further policies in upper secondary education. They need to be aware of the persistent structural inequalities that can result from the selection process they devise, and to be aware that individual decision-making does not necessarily mean individual agency. Without due consideration of how pupils make their decisions the system cannot be tailored to their individual needs, nor can it effectively focus upon broader societal issues of citizenship and economic sustainability.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

First and foremost, my sincerest gratitude is extended to my adviser, Professor Marilyn Osborn. In addition to giving me direction in carrying out my research, she has provided endless encouragement and motivation. Without her support and understanding it would not have been possible to complete this study alongside the demands of having a young family. Secondly, I would like to thank the Economic and Social Research Council for funding this project. I would also like to thank all those in the department and faculty who have provided me with the necessary advice and information throughout.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

SIGNED: Claire Poppy

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Abbreviations

A Level, Year 2	A2
Advanced Extension Award	AEA
Assessment and Qualifications Alliance	AQA
Advanced Supplement	AS
Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education	AVCE
Business and Technician Education Council	BTEC
Careers education and guidance	CEG
Central Statistical Bureau	SSB
Confederation of British Industry	CBI
Certificate in Secondary Education	CSE
Cultural Historical Activity Theory	CHAT
Department for Education and Skills	DfES
Department for Employment and Education	DfEE
Det Norske Arbeiderparti	DNA
Diploma Development Partnership	DDP
European Economic Area	EEA
Economic and Social Research Council	ESRC
European Union	EU
Further Education	FE
General Certificate of Education, Advanced level	GCE A
General Certificate of Education, Ordinary level	GCE O
General Certificate in Secondary Education	GCSE
General National Vocational Qualification	GNVQ
International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement	IEA
The International Society for Cultural and Activity Research	ISCAR
Local Authority	LA
Local Education Authority	LEA
Ministry for Education and Research	UFD
Ministry for Education, Research and Church Affairs	KUF
National Council of Vocational Qualifications	NCVQ
National Vocational Qualification	NVQ
Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations	OCR
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	OECD
Office for Standards in Education	OFSTED
Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries	OPEC

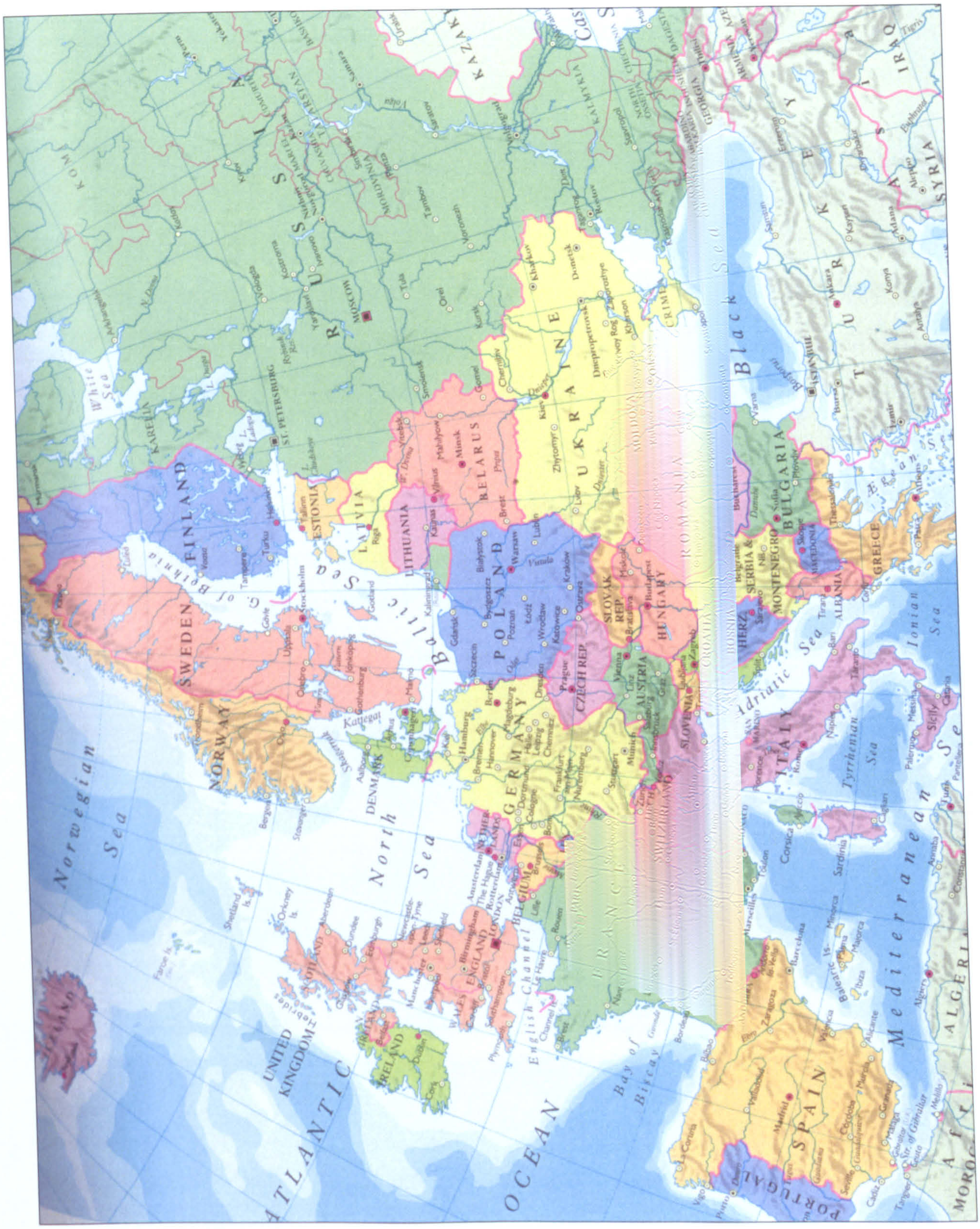
Open University	OU
Postgraduate Certificate of Education	PGCE
Qualification and Curriculum Authority	QCA
Rational Action Theory	RAT
Standardised Assessment Task	SAT
School Curriculum and Assessment Authority	SCAA
Statistical Package for the Social Sciences	SPSS
Statistisk Sentralbyrå	SSB
Technical and Vocational Education Initiative	TVEI
University and Colleges Admissions Service	UCAS
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	UK
University of London Examinations and Assessment Council	ULEAC
University of West England	UWE
Videregående skole	VGS

Translations

Aetat	Employment Agency
Allmenn	General
Allmennfaglig	General studies
Allmennlinje	General line
Arbeidsdirektoratet	Directorate of Labour
Avdelingen	The department
Avgangsvitnemål	Leaver's certificate
Barnehage	Nursery
Barneskole	Primary school
Barnetoget	The children's parade
Det Norske Arbeiderparti	The Norwegian Labour Party
Dronning	Queen
Elever	Pupils
Etisk	Ethical
Fagbrevet	Letter of Proficiency
Folkeskole	Folk school
Folkehøgskole	Folk High School
Forskning	Research
Fravær	Absence
Fylke	County
Generell Studiekompetanse	General Study Competence
Gjennomsnitt	Average grade
Grunnkurs	Foundation course
Grunnskole	Primary and Lower Secondary school
Gymnas	Academic school
Høyre	Conservative Party
Høyskole	Tertiary college
Inntakskontoret	Admissions office
Inspektør	Deputy Head teacher
Kirke og undervisningsdepartementet	Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs
Kristelig Folkeparti	Christian Democratic Party
Kommune	Council
Kompetansebevis	Statement of competence
Kong	King
Kunnskapsløftet	The promotion of knowledge

Lærling	Apprentice
Mai	May
Norge	Norway
Oppfølgingstjeneste	Follow-up service
Orden	Orderliness
Påbygging	General Subjects Supplement
Rammeverk	Framework
Retning	Specialisation
Revue	School leaver's annual show
Russ	Academic/Business school leaver
Russeavis	School leaver's newspaper
Russekort	School leaver's card
Russetid	School leaver's celebration time
Rådgiver	Guidance counsellor
Sensor(er)	External examiner(s)
Skole	School
Skoleetaten	Education Agency
Slottet	The castle
Sosiallærer	Social teacher
Spørreskjema	Questionnaire
Statistisk Sentralbyrå	Central Statistical Bureau
Storting	Parliament
Studieretning	Study specialisation
Standpunktkarakter	Annual internal grade
Ungdomsskole	Lower Secondary school
Utdanningsdirektoratet	Directorate of Education
Utdannings og forskningsdepartementet	Ministry of Education and Research
Valgfag	Elective subject
Veivalg?	Which way?
Venstre	Liberal Party
Videregående skole	Upper secondary school
Vitnemål	Certificate/diploma
Vitnemål. Videregående opplæring	Diploma of upper secondary education
Yrkesfag	Vocational subject
Yrkeslinje	Vocational line
Yrkesopplæringsnemd	Vocational Training Committee
Yrkesskole	Vocational school

Political Map of Europe



Reprinted from Philip's (2005:7).

Note: This map depicts the geographical position of England and Norway in relation to each other and also includes the location of the two cities in the study, Bristol and Oslo.

Chapter One - Introduction

In a period characterised by change, the goals of education and its future role are now fiercely debated. Educational reforms have included increased participation rates, increased levels of basic education, decentralisation of power, and increased accountability of teachers. Such changes are occurring worldwide; as a result of common economic, demographic and social trends, many countries have adopted similar policy developments (Green, Wolf & Leney, 1999). The policies which guide such reforms tend to follow two distinct but parallel aims - education for *individual* gain, and education for *societal* gain. Personal development and accomplishment are recognised as important in creating motivated citizens, later able to contribute towards their society. At the same time it is a widely held belief that it is essential for members of a given society to adopt the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes if that society is to sustain its economic growth. Education, now, in the 21st century, more than ever before, is viewed as a means of establishing a competitive edge over and above other nations in what has become termed the 'knowledge economy'. As Broadfoot notes, "Both individuals and institutions, and even whole systems of educational provision, are necessarily becoming increasingly focused on achieving those measures which are the key to survival in the international educational competition" (2000a:359).

Educational policy in post-compulsory education, the interface between compulsory schooling and higher education or the world of work, has been geared towards meeting global challenges. Gleeson writes, "Diverse influences at home and abroad, unemployment, decline in manufacturing, changing technology and work organisation, marketisation and global factors, have meant that political interest in post-compulsory education has become a universal phenomenon" (1997:87). There are, however, many factors which underpin upper secondary schooling and a thorough understanding of these is necessary in the implementation of reform. A key aspect of post-16 education is the transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education and the choices which this involves. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the processes of decision-making in which young people are involved in order to both inform policy and to emphasise the real lived experiences of those within the system. How do pupils really decide whether or not to 'stay on'? Why do they really choose to study one subject over another? Do school guidance-counsellors really help in making choices that will shape a pupil's entire life? Policy-makers need to fully understand how these processes occur if they are to devise and implement a system that will achieve societal goals whilst also doing justice to individual goals. They need to be guided away from the misconception that human capital theory captures the approach pupils adopt in their decision-making, a criticism levelled at policy-makers in the United Kingdom (UK), for example (Ball, Macrae & Maguire, 2000), and instead directed towards the more complex, less

straightforward pathways which an increasing number of researchers are finding. Examples of these experiences are outlined as a series of 18 vignettes in Appendix 14.

A parallel concern of the study is the importance of context and the need to consider the influence of culture upon experience and policy. International quantitative studies and various league tables are increasingly shaping educational policy within nation states as part of the global competition for economic sustainability. This study strives to illustrate the importance of context in understanding the processes of choice and decision-making in pupils. This thesis is, therefore, grounded in socio-cultural theory which emphasises the need to understand and interpret phenomena within its particular cultural context. It is argued that through a cultural comparative study relevant factors may be perceived more clearly. In essence, therefore, this research is concerned with *'pupils' perspectives about their experiences in upper secondary education as a means of examining the processes of decision-making and the influences of cultural experience upon these processes in order to inform policy development'*.

The academic and theoretical origins of the study are one consideration, the personal origins of this research, however, may be found in two parallel aspects of my life. Having become increasingly aware of the factors which impinged upon my own choices and experiences over the last 20 years, and the values and commitments that I have developed, the topic of decision-making was of particular interest. At the same time, my involvement with research and issues related to comparative education became stronger as a result of living in Norway (with my Norwegian husband) and in completing an MPhil in Comparative and International Education at the University of Oslo. In living between the two countries, I feel I have developed a somewhat bi-cultural approach to my life. (A fuller account of this pathway may be found in appendix 14).

1.1 Rationale

This introductory section is divided into four intrinsically linked parts, corresponding to the four foci of the project – Why investigate pupils' perspectives? (1.1.1), Why study decision-making? (1.1.2) Why research upper secondary education? (1.1.3), and Why take a comparative approach? (1.1.4). Note that *upper secondary education* refers to the 16-19 post-compulsory age-group. It encompasses individuals who remain in education regardless of the institution where they study. Furthermore, for ease of understanding it is used consistently throughout when, in practice, other terms may be more commonly applied. For example, in this thesis, students in colleges of further education may equally be referred to as pupils in upper secondary education.

1.1.1 Pupils' Perspectives

The daily lived experiences of pupils in upper secondary education are marked by change and choice, hopes and ambitions. It is a crucial time for most young people, and one influenced by earlier educational experiences, family background, institutional and national policies, and by accidental or unplanned incidents which, nevertheless, impinge upon their lives (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 1999). The pupil experience, therefore, is potentially complex and difficult to characterise and only through engaging with pupils will their perspectives and experiences become apparent. Given the far-reaching effects of any policy-developments in upper secondary education with consequences for citizenship, future national economic development, life long learning, and so forth, the views of pupils and all those directly involved within the educational system, have to be a crucial element. Hodgkin notes "The fact is that pupils themselves have a huge potential contribution to make, not as passive objects but as active players in the education system. Any (policy) concerning school standards will be seriously weakened if it fails to recognise the importance of that contribution" (1998:11). This may be exemplified by Bloomer's (1997) finding that even a statutory curriculum will be re-interpreted and contextualised according to the personal circumstances of the pupils. Thus it seems sensible to take account of those perspectives in the production of curricula and other policies if their implementation is to be 'successful'.

A number of researchers have shown an interest in pupils' perspectives and their contribution towards policy development. Perhaps most notably, Jean Rudduck has sought to provide pupils with a 'voice'. She has been concerned with respecting and representing the views of teachers and students for many years, and writes about her focus on "....the idea of pupils and teachers as puppets, dancing on the strings of other people's visions" (1991:21). Broadfoot (2000a) argues that, in focusing upon quantifiable learning outcomes as a means of assessing whether policies have been effective, policy-makers have neglected the perspective of the individuals at whom the policies are directed. Even where pupils have had the opportunity to contribute, a further problem arises in the mismatch between what is said, and in how this is interpreted and implemented in policy. Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996), for example, suggest that policy-makers, in the UK at least, persist in adopting a technically rational view (Habermas, 1972) of decision-making in which pupils pursue a human capitalist approach to achieving their educational goals. In addition, Smyth and Hattam suggest that "Exploring and explicating complexity does not rest at all easily with the requirement of policy-makers for rendering, simplicity, reduction and utility in research – all aspects that run counter to voiced research, with its tendency towards cacophony, multiplicity and idiosyncrasy" (2001:408).

A slightly different emphasis upon the issue of pupils' perspectives is the concept of 'social demand'. This refers to whether an educational system offers consumers the type of educational system they would like. This is particularly important given the emphasis upon satisfying

individual needs. At the core of social demand is the idea that education is an instrument for enhanced life chances and career prospects. Accountability and value for money have become issues within education. Clearly, with the advent of consumerism, decentralisation of power, and increased public decision-making, an awareness of what the 'consumers' of upper secondary education desire would be useful. What is their social reality? An investigation into this would help provide information about which choices are now important to students, how countries can better meet future needs and demands, and what are the constraints that their national historical foundations will create? As Rudduck and Flutter put it, "In a climate that respects the market and the consumer it is strange that pupils in school have not been seen as consumers worth consulting" (2000:75).

A final consideration with regard to pupils' perspectives is whether they perceive the system in which they are learning as adhering to democratic notions of equality of treatment and individual freedom. Liberal political theory is the foundation for many countries and concepts such as equality, individual freedom, human rights, and moral justifications are guiding principles for policy decisions of the state. General educational aims, for example, include a focus upon the right to education and equality of access regardless of gender, race, age, socio-economic status, disability or geographical location. Education is often seen as a prerequisite for individuals to achieve their full potential as well as a means of enhancing economic competitiveness for a given country or region, whilst also encapsulating notions of citizenship and tolerance. A study of pupils' perspectives provides an opportunity to explore issues of access and equality of treatment as set down in the general aims of education.

1.1.2 Decision-making

Educational policy addresses two broad categories – what may be called *individual needs* – knowledge and skills, personal development, support and guidance, and *societal needs* – future economic sustainability and responsible citizens. The two are, of course, inter-related. The problem in addressing such issues, in post-compulsory education at least, is that there must be an element of choice. Only in this way can individual needs be met in conjunction with societal. What naturally follows from this is that policy-makers must base their policies, and the educational system which is implemented on the basis of these policies, upon some specific assumptions about how choices and decisions are made.

Two related theories, Human Capital theory and Rational Action theory (RAT), derived from the field of economics, were introduced into education in the 1960s and 1970s (Schultz, 1961, Boudin, 1974), and have had much bearing upon policy-makers understanding of pupil decision-making. Human capital refers to ".... knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are developed and valued primarily for their economically productive potential" (Baptiste, 2001:185). Human capital theory,

as described by Baptiste (2001), is founded upon a range of economic assumptions applied to human behaviour. These include the following assertions - that there is a causal relationship between human capital and economic productivity; that differential income results only from differential investment of individuals in their education; that humans only make choices which will maximise their benefits; that there are only two social structures in society – the rational individual and the free market; and that individuals' preferences are not thought to change over time. Likewise, in describing RAT, Hatcher notes, "…. people behave according to their interests, attempting to maximise the utility of their decisions. Decisions about education progression are made on the basis of calculations of the costs, benefits and probabilities of success of various options. Success is defined in terms of the subsequent economic returns (as measured by income and occupational class location)" (1998:10). Thus, within the area of pupil choice, the assumption is that pupils set themselves goals based upon aspirations and potential rewards and pursue these in a fairly direct uncompromised manner.

There has been much criticism of the application of economic theories within the field of education. Many argue that policy-makers fail to capture the real processes involved in decision-making when assuming that pupils adopt a rational utilitarian approach. Implicit to a 'rational' approach is the assumption that young people are aware of their abilities and preferences beforehand and that they are able to evaluate themselves and then apply this knowledge in making a choice about their future lives. There is also the assumption that young people are aware of economic, work and social relations and their effect on their future chances. Bloomer (1997) suggests that this type of decision-making process stems from a stratified society in which allocation to particular occupations is straightforward and based upon academic success. Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) similarly criticise a market approach to choice and decision-making in pupils. They suggest that there exists an oversimplified view in which it is perceived that high skills equate with high productivity which equates with high wages, and Avis et al (1996) claim that providing a range of options, clear routes for progression, and appropriate guidance procedures, is simply the ideology of individualism and market forces in the guise of individual empowerment. The argument by many researchers, therefore, is that any policies founded upon human capital or rational action theories simply pander to economic perspectives with little consideration of individual needs, nor do they take account of any of the complexities of 'real life' which can impact upon the decision-making process. Given the overwhelming concerns by many researchers, there is much to be gained in further investigating the actual processes involved in pupil decision-making as a means of informing future policy-development.

There have been a number of relevant studies which are concerned with young peoples' decision-making experiences in education, all largely with a more 'culturalist' perspective. The focus of these studies is fairly broad and includes studies with an emphasis upon parental choice of school

(Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995), the impact of education upon inter-generational identities in Finland (Antikainen et al, 1996), the impact of the 'learning society' rhetoric upon post-16 choices and pathways (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000), decision-making in compulsory schooling (White, 2002, 2007 forthcoming), pupil and teacher agency in curriculum creation and delivery (Bloomer, 1997), transitions from school into employment (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996), the experiences of learners in further education (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 1997), and inequalities within youth experiences (Bates & Riseborough, 1993). As with all areas of research, it is important to build up a body of literature. A study which focuses upon the actual pupils' perspectives and the particular processes involved in making the transition into, and the journey through, upper secondary will help contribute to a debate about the particular mechanisms involved within the decision-making process such that policy may be founded upon more informed assumptions about choice.

1.1.3 Upper Secondary Education

Why research upper secondary education? The simple answer to this question is that it is of vital importance to the future economic and moral development of many nation states. The more information we have available to us about this phase in education the better informed we are to create a system that will serve the pupils and society as a whole.

Upper secondary education constitutes the two or three year period at the end of compulsory schooling, and for many, marks the transition period from life as a pupil at school, into that of a student in higher education, or as an employee within the workforce. Upper secondary education, with its vast tapestry of qualifications and institutions, bridges the gap between school as an institution in its own right, to school as an active source of knowledge and skills for future members of a given society. It is a crucial period in considering how education and training can meet the needs of a nation. It is for this reason that this period is, perhaps, more sensitive to national and international decision-making by policy-makers, as well as being the highest expression of the distinct philosophies of education (McLean, 1995), and emphasising the repercussions of economic integration upon education (Husen, Tuijnman & Halls, 1992). Indeed, Gleeson notes that "…. international monitoring of post-compulsory education by the OECD and the World Bank, in terms of assessing national economic growth and development, has raised global interest in post-school issues" (1997:86). At the same time, it is the first opportunity that students have to make a real choice about their future direction, be it in terms of continued studies, curriculum, examinations, finding employment and so forth and coincides with a time when identity development is an important part of young people's lives. Thus this two or three year period provides a point at which both the needs of the individual and of society are to be met.

In creating the link between compulsory schooling and higher education or the work force, upper secondary education has traditionally served as a means of preparing young people for what lies ahead of them, both in terms of their personal development and the nature of their future. In many countries it has been used as a filtering process to determine who should or should not study further. However, with the general move in Europe towards the American concept of mass higher education (Altbach, 1992), upper secondary education will not necessarily be needed as a selection process. In Sweden, for example, no such leaving examination exists, and in France, there are targets of an 80% pass rate in the Baccalaureate which gives all students the right to attend some form of higher education. In moving away from elitism in this way, one may argue that societies are in fact becoming more democratic. With this in mind, Husen, Tjunman and Halls suggest that within Europe at least, upper secondary education no longer serves its original purpose and is, in fact, becoming a 'free standing' institution.

Changes in the labour market also influence upper secondary education. In the first place calls by organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank for a labour force competent for working with information technology have a direct impact. There is an increased demand for employees to be trained with 'transferable' skills which will equip them for the rapid changes that occur within the industry of information technology. Flexibility in mind and approach are praiseworthy attributes and 'innovation' seems to be the key to success. In many countries, upper secondary education is considered to be the most appropriate point in a student's schooling to train them with such skills. Upper secondary is the foundation to all education that follows, for whatever purposes. Such concerns have been reflected in policy-development and educational research. Indeed, in writing about post-compulsory education and the transition to work, Plug, Zeijl and Du Bois-Reymond note the change in emphasis resulting from labour market trends - "Structural shifts in the labour market from manufacturing industries towards service industries, which, among other things, were accompanied by the prolongation of educational trajectories, have led to more attention being paid to youth transitions and youth biographies" (2003:127).

1.1.4 Comparative Education

The notion of comparison is fundamental to science itself. Only in having an understanding of what is beyond oneself, is it possible to make a judgement about what is within. As Pepin (2001) notes "Through the comparison of the known with the novel, we are likely to achieve an intellectual distance from the phenomena. This allows us to examine the things that we see and experience every day, and to investigate those taken-for-granted assumptions, which in turn can lead to a deeper understanding of the issues of concern" (pg 2). It is this basic precept upon which the field of comparative education is founded and this is, essentially, the rationale for such an

approach. This study rests upon the implicit assumption that in making a comparison between two countries the findings will be better elucidated.

Whilst comparative educational research has been a developing field since the 1930s, it mainly focused upon national studies as opposed to international. It is only since the 1990s that the relevance of international comparison has come to the fore for policy-makers. Clearly, the informational age has created new challenges for politicians and new priorities for research. Whilst its logic is now integrated into all aspects of societies, be it the institutions, culture, or economy, it has also created inter-dependency between nations (Castells, 1999a). In this context, one witnesses increased co-operation between societies, and yet at the same time, there are increased levels of competitiveness. Survival is perceived as possible only through outperforming other nations. Thus comparative education has begun to offer information for governments and policy-makers that, although previously interesting, is now viewed as essential. In current times education appears to be a key component in increased economic growth and, perhaps, as a consequence of this, is more influenced by international factors than national policies. European influences and harmonization within educational policy are a key example of this.

Much of the international research has been quantitative in nature. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) with its origins dating back to 1958, for example, makes comparisons across more than 40 countries, mainly in the subject-areas of language, maths, and science. It is a well-established means of collecting and disseminating information about educational systems worldwide. Green, Wolf and Leney (1999) also suggest that governments rely heavily upon international league tables as a means of gauging whether or not educational reforms within their nation state have been effective in raising standards and increasing participation, whilst Vulliamy (2004) suggests that governments often use these findings as a means of promoting 'evidence-based' policy-making. In spite of this, such studies have come under much criticism including problems with design, and with educational reform which arises as a result of the findings. Crossley (2000) claims that problems stem from the way in which policy-makers utilise 'relative positions' on league tables to justify changes in educational policies at a national level. In a similar vein, Osborn argues that "In recent years there has been a growing tendency to 'borrow' educational policies and practices from one national setting where they appear to be effective and to attempt to transplant these into another with little regard for the potential significance of the cultural context into which they will be imported" (2004: 265).

Perhaps there is a need for educational researchers to lead the way with policy-makers, to address the issue of comparison between cultures more openly, and in such a way, encourage the utilisation of results in a more appropriate fashion. As it stands, much of the criticism of large-scale quantitative studies has come from within the field of comparative education (McLean, 1992).

Indeed, Broadfoot (2000a) suggests comparative research should focus on individuals rather than systems, whilst Alexander (2000) distinguishes between 'comparative education' and 'policy-directed educational comparison'. Furthermore, Vulliamy (2004) argues that the 'systematisation' of research, resulting from global dissemination of findings via computer technology, favours positivist traditions and undermines qualitative comparative research, even though qualitative methods may be better attuned to understanding the experiences of participants within their contextual settings (McNess, 2004). Indeed, the role of the researcher in developing a thorough understanding of the research environment lies at the heart of many arguments regarding comparative research. King (2000) suggests that the significance of comparative education lies in the researcher's informed interpretation of context, policy-making and opportunities for change. It is crucial, therefore, that a new approach to comparative educational research is developed, adhering to qualitative methods which are sensitive to the cultural context. In this vein, Broadfoot, Osborn and colleagues have placed great emphasis upon developing methodologies which respect culture (Broadfoot, Osborn, Planel and Sharpe, 2000, Osborn, 2001, Osborn, Broadfoot, McNess, Planel, Ravn and Triggs, 2005). Policy-makers need to be shown that context does matter and that data alone is insufficient. It is hoped that this research project can contribute towards this evolving process.

1.1.5 Summary

This study takes educational policy as its starting point with its aims to meet individual and societal needs. It recognises that in order to succeed policy-makers must create opportunities and choices for pupils such that individual needs are met but, at the same time, a sufficient number of pupils are guided to make choices which will benefit society as a whole. This research questions how these young people experience the decision-making process and whether they are satisfied with their experience. Upper secondary education, a significant juncture in the lives of many young people, creates a stage for these considerations since it is a time when choice and opportunity are of the utmost. It also takes a comparative qualitative approach, recognising not only the importance of comparison as a means of achieving a better understanding of one's own culture but also the importance of understanding cultural context as a backdrop for the successful implementation of policy.

1.2 Research Aims

In light of the issues raised in the previous section, the aims of this research project are as follows:-

1. To use a comparative qualitative approach to explore the policy aims for upper secondary education and its implementation in England and Norway.

2. To explore the experience of pupils in upper secondary education and the processes by which their choices and decisions for the future are made, thereby giving them a voice in contemporary research and better informing policy-makers of the *consumer's* perspective.

3. To contribute empirically towards a growing body of research into pupils' perspectives by providing data within a socio-cultural context.

1.3 Research Questions

The aims of the study are translated into four specific research questions:-

1. What are the stated aims and purposes of policy in upper secondary education in England and Norway and how are these achieved?

2. What are the decision-making experiences of pupils in upper secondary education in England and Norway concerned with educational and career choices and what are the major similarities and differences between the two countries?

3. How do factors such as gender, race and class affect the experiences of pupils in upper secondary education in England and Norway, particularly in relation to choice and access?

4. To what extent are *national educational policy*, its *implementation* and *pupils' perspectives* socio-cultural constructs, and what might be learnt from contextualising upper secondary education?

1.4 Remark: choice and decision-making

Whilst the focus of this thesis is upon decision-making, the connection with the concept of *choice* needs to be iterated.

Choice is intrinsically linked with the decision-making process but is a difficult concept to grasp. There is an ambiguity which needs to be overcome. A range of *choices* or options may be available; one makes the decision or *chooses* to select one of the options and, in so doing, has made a *choice*. Thus, to use the word 'choice', without qualification, could refer to that which is on offer, the process of selecting, or the outcome of the decision. Furthermore, the connotations associated with the concept can be misleading. To receive choices implies equality of opportunity but disguises the many constraints which might impinge. For example, Ball, Davies, David and Reay (2002:51) note, "Used without care, choice can 'smuggle in' an untheorised 'free agent'....".

If one is not careful, one might neglect the great impact that structural factors can have upon individual choice. They suggest that it is sometimes more useful to stress the role of decision-making since this concept has more explicit assumptions concerning both individual agency and the possible constraints of external factors; it is for this reason that the study focuses upon the decision-making process. This does not mean, however, that the concept of choice is neglected. The term is used interchangeably with decision-making throughout the thesis when referring to *making* a choice, and the impact of *receiving* choices is discussed at relevant points.

1.5 Assumptions

The assumptions underlying this study were derived from personal experience having previously lived, and previously carried out research, in both England and Norway. It was anticipated that English pupils would experience more difficulties in the decision-making process and display greater levels of dissatisfaction. The reasoning behind such an assumption was that the extent of recent change within the English educational system, the amount of assessment required of pupils, and the knowledge that English pupils are pressured to make decisions about their futures at an early stage in their educational career, would all contribute to a more stressful learning environment. In Norway, however, there is a sense of equality and fairness, participation rates in upper secondary education are high, and pupils are encouraged to delay the decision-making process, viewing their education as a goal in itself. These were the guarded assumptions which were held in the initial stages of the study.

1.6 Methodology

This is a qualitative comparative study with some supporting quantitative data. Furthermore, the study has involved examination of the cultural context, including the educational systems and policies of both countries. A large sample of questionnaires was issued to students as a means of selecting a smaller sample for interview from 10 schools/colleges. Those interviewed were contacted again at least 12 months later to explore how their situation or experience had changed. A number of representatives from the institutions and careers guidance counsellors were also interviewed.

1.7 Thesis Plan

This thesis is divided into eight chapters as outlined below:-

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This chapter introduces the thesis with the rationale for the study, the research aims and the research questions.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework

This chapter establishes the importance of individual agency, structural factors, and identity within the study. It also outlines the key theoretical components of the study (*habitus* and *careership*) whilst also positioning the research within a socio-cultural framework.

Chapter 3 – Method and Analyses

This chapter outlines all elements of the methodology including the sampling process, materials, procedure, and ethical issues.

Chapter 4 – Context and Culture

This chapter serves the dual purpose of providing a cultural backdrop to the study through consideration of the historical and political features of England and Norway, whilst also being a source of data with regard to the current educational systems and national policy.

Chapter 5 – Phase I – Questionnaires

This chapter focuses upon the findings derived from the questionnaires. The analysis involves consideration of pupil opinions and patterns in pupil responses.

Chapter 6 – Phase II – Interviews

This chapter identifies the main themes of the study, including the nature of the decision-making adopted by the pupils.

Chapter 7 – Interpretation and Discussion

In this chapter the four research questions are answered based upon the findings in the previous chapters. Those themes which emerged from the data are also discussed in some detail.

Chapter 8 – Conclusions

This chapter draws the thesis to a close with a discussion of the limitations to the study and consideration of the way forward for policy-makers and researchers working within the field of upper secondary education.

Chapter Two - Theoretical Framework

Decision-making, and the contexts in which young people in the 21st century make their choices, are increasingly transformed and complex. They live in a world vastly different to their parents' generation in which educational and career structures were more predictable and secure. There are increased demands upon them to become educated at higher levels, to equip themselves with skills for the future, to adopt an approach to learning that will guarantee flexibility and continued knowledge. Their world is fast and characterised by changing technology. They have increased access to information leading to greater expectations in terms of product acquisition, social networks, and access to the world of travel. Such changes are also thought to have led to a cognitive change with a greater focus on the individual (Giddens, 1991, Beck, 1992). Thomson, Flynn, Roche and Tucker have referred to this as the 'can do' ethos – "the idea that 'anyone can make it as long as they try hard enough', with young people tending to blame failure on their individual faults rather than on wider economic conditions or social policies" (2004:xiv). At this time, educational policy changes strive to provide increased opportunities for young people, thereby providing many pupils with opportunities which their parents and grandparents would never have experienced. This is a time in which young people are moving forward, largely unsupported by history. They are making choices about upper secondary education and their futures in a context that is unlike that of previous decades.

The issues of pupil perspective, choice, opportunity, decision-making and other such topics bring into question the issue of agency. Are pupils active participants in their educational careers or are they simply pawns in a structured society which constrains the actions of individuals? In the field of upper secondary education, in particular, the work of researchers such as Bloomer, Ball, Maguire and Macrae, Hodkinson and Sparkes, is predominant (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000; Bloomer, 2001; Bloomer & Hodkinson, 1997; Bloomer & Hodkinson, 1999; Hodkinson, 1998; Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2000; Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2001; Hodkinson & Sparkes 1997; Macrae, Maguire & Ball, 1997; Maguire, Ball & Macrae, 2001). Related work can be found in White's (2002, 2007 forthcoming) work concerned with pupil's decision-making in compulsory education, Pugsley's (1998) focus upon student choices in higher education, and Brooks' (2003) research concerning the influence of family and friends upon decision-making in higher education. Certain theoretical perspectives, including Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *field,* and Hodkinson and Sparkes' theory of *careership* have increasingly been applied. Other researchers have focused upon the notion of *world view* to help them to conceptualise the way in which choices and decisions are informed (Black, Warburton, Corbin & Campbell, 2002). In addition, there are strong indications that structural factors continue to play a significant role in shaping the process of decision-making for young people with the work of Archer (2002), Ball et al (2002), Brown (2001), Francis (2002),

and Reay and colleagues (1997, 2000, 2003), emphasising the importance of class, gender, and race in pupil identity. This chapter will strive to outline much of this research and to consider its particular relevance to this study. At the intersection between individual agency and structural constraints is the issue of identity in young people and how it influences decision-making; this too is considered.

The comparative nature of this research also calls for a particular framework that can account for pupil perspectives from different cultures. It is possible to establish a series of theories which cohesively link individual thought and action with context and, more broadly, with culture. To make explicit the importance of culture, the study focuses upon socio-cultural theory which forms part of the cultural historical school, founded by Lev Vygotsky in the 1920s (Vygotsky, 1986), and is more recently known as Cultural Historical Activity Theory or CHAT. In addition, Hedegaard's (2001) model of 'learning through participation in institutionalised practice' provides a useful means of locating the individual within both an institutional and societal setting.

2.1 Individual Agency

Although very little literature relates directly to decision-making within upper secondary education, and certainly does not include a comparative element, several researchers within the field of education have drawn together a number of theoretical strands which are pertinent to this research topic. Those concepts which are of particular relevance are Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson's notion of *careership* and related studies, many of which draw heavily upon the work of Bourdieu and, in particular, the concept of *habitus*. This section begins with a discussion of *habitus* and related concepts before fully exploring the topic of choice and decision-making in education in section 2.1.2.

2.1.1 Bourdieu's concepts

2.1.1.1 Habitus

Bourdieu began to consider the issue of structuralism and the agency of individuals within society in *Champs intellectuel et project createur* in 1966. He argued against the view that agents are passive supports of social structures, and also against any claims that the social world can be viewed in terms of objective relations, independent of the agency of individuals. For Bourdieu, people act with both their internal and personal intentions, and with constraints from outside.

Rational action, in modern science, is essentially understood as located in the individual. Actions are intentional and instrumental, and influenced by the beliefs and desires of agents (Bohman, 1999). Such a view takes little account of the social or collective setting in which the beliefs and

desires of the many must be accommodated, nor of the way in which groups can work together to achieve collective goals, or in fact, to achieve varying individual goals. Bourdieu's work is an account of *practical* reason; he argues against both subjectivist explanations of 'intention' and the objectivism of structuralism.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is an attempt to overcome the conflict between structure and agency. Though never clearly defined, it is understood to be a set of dispositions, generally inherited, which individuals act out and continuously adapt. Bourdieu writes, "*Habitus*, [may be understood as] systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (1990a:53).

A person's dispositions, their propensity to act in a particular way, become their *habitus* when that disposition is also encoded with a certain cultural understanding. The ways in which that person acts gives meaning to their actions, it expresses information about them and their social setting. For Bourdieu, *habitus* does not imply that a person is constrained nor that their actions lose their spontaneity for the direction comes from within but it does suggest that they do not completely exercise 'free will' (Bourveresse, 1999). Instead, it is more a description of the works of cultural constraint without overt rules to govern actions. People are socialised into a *habitus* that regulates their actions because it becomes part of their persona. The *habitus* can be used to explain how individuals may be oriented towards achieving a certain end without being conscious of this. They act within the regularities of their context.

The *habitus* overrides internal drives; since the *habitus* is an internalization of the outside world, it is a means of allowing external forces to exert themselves on individuals in a non-mechanical way. "This infinite yet strictly limited generative capacity is difficult to understand only so long as one remains located in the usual antinomies - which the concept of the *habitus* aims to transcend - of determinism and freedom, conditioning and creativity, consciousness and unconscious, or the individual and society" (Bourdieu, 1990a:55). Further, it ensures that the past experiences of a group become fully integrated into the current members of the group and passed on from one generation to the next.

This account of individual agency within social constraints also provides an explanation of situations in which individuals apparently have the opportunity to act but do not do so. If one is to look at the 'objective probabilities' of what a person is capable of, and that individual's aspirations, one is likely to find a close correlation. This is not because people consciously evaluate their

chances of success and, therefore, alter their goals. It is more that the dispositions which constitute their *habitus* hold the possibilities and opportunities of a particular group. Thus, the conditions in which the dispositions are formed create a *habitus* which is 'pre-adapted' to the demands of those conditions. People, therefore, do not yearn for something outside of their situation. "The most improbable practices are therefore excluded, unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable" (Bourdieu, 1990a:54).

2.1.1.2 Field

Bourdieu also utilised the concept of *field* to describe the way in which he believed individuals played a part in the construction of their position within a social setting. The *field* results from the interaction between an individual's *habitus,* their resources or *capital*, and the specific rules of a particular *field* or setting.

Although no individual represents a stable and unchanging element within society, the collective actions of many citizens within different *fields* create the social structures of a given culture. Individuals are members of a particular group, the group a member of a class, and the class are part of the whole structure of the society. In this way, it is possible, Bourdieu argues, to explain the way in which social agents construct social structures within society through their practice. Structures are not objectively fixed entities, but social phenomena. Moreover, he suggests that differences between groups or classes are artificially created as a means of distinguishing themselves from others. Through the concept of *field* it is possible to explain a constantly changing society which, at the same time, manages to reproduce itself.

2.1.1.3 Cultural Capital and Cultural Reproduction

In order to explain how the differences between social structures are created Bourdieu (1997) introduced the concept of *cultural capital.* This is a set of values and attitudes, or a 'taste' which is purported to be an innate quality passed on from one generation to the next. More broadly, it refers to the resources individuals hold and are able to utilise as a means of making gains within society, for example, educational qualifications, dialect, family background, and so on. This concept is closely related to his work on *cultural reproduction* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

The theory of *cultural reproduction* is concerned with class membership and the way in which individual's seek to reproduce the values and attitudes of their class. More specifically, Bourdieu suggests that those who are members of the dominant class utilise the educational system as a means of ensuring that their view of society is viewed by all as 'superior', thereby maintaining class distinctions. Success within the educational system is achieved through the possession of *cultural*

capital. Whilst the educational system does not actually stratify pupils according to their class, those pupils from the dominant class do better and, therefore, receive better grades. Other social institutions make judgements based upon academic results and thus the stratification within society is reinforced.

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2.1.2 Careership

Decision-making, as a topic for research, has received interest in various disciplines. Existing theories within psychology, for example, have focused upon either individual traits or social/cultural factors, and more recently, goal-setting (Little, 1998, Galotti, 2005). Within the sociology of education the distinction tends to be between the economically-derived, Rational Action Theory, a 'structuralist' approach which focuses upon macro-level decision-making and, in particular, class reproduction (Boudon, 1974, Goldthorpe, 1995, 1996, 1998) and a 'culturalist' approach which, supported by the work of Bourdieu, focuses upon micro-level decision-making and individual biographies. It is largely within this latter area that this study is positioned given the focus upon pupils' perspectives and pupil voice.

Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) sought to establish a position on decision-making based on data derived from a study of pupils making the transition to work in the 1990s. Their findings did not cohere with the technical rational approach which educational policy strives towards (see figure 1 below). They refer to the work of Habermas (1972), who describes how *instrumental rationality* or *technical interest*, just one area of human interest, is focused upon goals, methods, and efficiency. This is the ethos adopted within the individualist market paradigm. Habermas suggested that, through this area of human interest, decision-making was shaped by cultural traditions and expectations rather than creating individual agency through communication and dialogue. In the context of this study, education would be simply concerned with the production of skills towards the goal of a strong economy. On an individual basis, a future career and financial gain would be the driving forces behind all choices.

Decision-making for the individuals in Hodkinson et al's study were very different from that described above. Their decisions were not necessarily planned, nor did they occur in isolation from involvement of others, but instead were a combination of what the individual contributed alongside social or cultural factors. They write, "In our model, individuals are neither dopes nor pawns, yet the limitations on their decisions are realistically recognised" (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997:32). Above all, they found that the decisions which individuals made about their careers were expressions of their identity. Bloomer (1997) also notes the importance of individual agency in his study of teacher and pupil responses to the national curriculum. He notes, "Routes and trajectories place students in an essentially passive role and, by so doing eliminate that most complex of

Figure 1 Comparison of 'technical rationality' and 'pragmatic rationality'

Technical Rationality	Pragmatic Rationality
1. Decision-making consists of applying rational skills to objective information derived from the labour market.	Decision-making is part of the development of habitus. Information is both subjective and objective, deriving from habitus as well as being external to it.
2. Decision-making is an individual activity, though individuals can be helped or hindered.	Decision-making is social and a culturally embedded activity.
3. Decision-making takes place within discursive consciousness.	Decision-making takes place within both practical and discursive consciousness.
4. Decision-making is directed at long term goals, though ideas often change before the goal is reached.	Decision-making might be directed at a long term goal but there are other possibilities. It might be an extension of the recent past or a response to serendipitous opportunities.
5. Decision-making follows a planned linear sequence, eg, (i) discover your own strengths, weaknesses and interests, (ii) weigh up possible choices, (iii) choose what to do.	Decision-making does not follow a linear sequence. Stages can be in any order and timed, occurring as chances are perceived. It does not always result in choice.
6. Decision-making should aim to be totally rational. Though this is never achieved, anything less is dysfunctional.	Decision-making is always boundedly rational, being partly governed by emotions and embedded in habitus.
7. Decision-making is based on maximising personal benefits, often seen in financial terms.	Decisions may be made for a wide range of reasons, not all part of discursive consciousness. Maximising benefits may be part of this for some people.
8. Decision-making is only improved by making it more rational and/or providing better information.	Decision-making can be enhanced by various means, including maximising discursive, rational thought and giving information.

Source: Hodkinson, Sparkes, and Hodkinson (1996:122).

variables, human agency, from the equation" (1997:29). Thus Hodkinson et al needed a concept which could explain the individual nature of decision-making but which, at the same time, took account of the external environment. The concept they developed was *careership*, and it is this model which is utilised to explain the decision-making process which occurs in this thesis.

Careership has three central features which are discussed below –

(i) decision-making is *pragmatic* and *rational*
(ii) choices occur as interactions within the *field*, and
(iii) choices occur within a life course which consists of both *routines* and *turning points*.

Firstly, Hodkinson and Sparkes found that young people were rational in their decision-making; they evaluated their experiences, they considered the advice of others and made rational decisions. At the same time, they were pragmatic in the sense that they made their decisions within the confines of their circumstances. This might involve a lack of information, a lack of real choice, or the restrictions that a particular background might place upon certain aspirations. They suggest pragmatically rational decision-making must be seen as having three inter-locked dimensions – (i) decision-making is integral to a person's choice of lifestyle including their social context and culture, (ii) decisions are part of an ongoing life course, and (iii) decision-making involves an interaction with other stakeholders, and thus, pragmatic decision-making must be understood as part of the actions of others as well as the particular individual making the choice - "Career decisions can only be understood in terms of the life histories of those who make them, wherein identity has evolved through interaction with significant others and with the culture in which the subject has lived and is living" (1997:33). Thus, what seems a sensible and predictable choice for one individual may not be for another because the essence of practical decision-making will rest specifically within that individual's context.

This point is also made by Ball et al (2000) who suggest that human capitalist assumptions about investment in the future play a subordinate role compared to the daily and immediate lives of young people, and that the decision-making process is marked by struggle and disappointment rather than a direct line between goals and their future achievement. This, too, is supported by Hodkinson et al's claim that students make opportunistic decisions, rather than following a career trajectory in which a particular goal is set and, thereafter, all choices are predetermined.

It would be misleading to suggest that pupils are passively influenced by their local and most immediate contexts. Students are actively participating in and constructing those local contexts. This constitutes the second feature involved in the concept of *careership* – young people make choices as a process which interacts within the *field*. This draws upon Bourdieu's work.

Hodkinson et al suggest that young people operate within an environment in which there are many different players with different sources of *capital* and with different priorities. Young people make their choices within this context and, thus, their choices cannot be viewed as a process operating within a vacuum. To expand this further, Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* can be used to capture the *position* of the student within a structural setting, but at the same time demonstrate how the individual may impact upon that setting. Bloomer and Hodkinson note, "It is an embodiment of the complex amalgam of what some would call structural factors, such as social class, gender and ethnicity, together with a person's genetic inheritance, all of which continually influence and are influenced by others through interaction" (2000:589). Choices are made within the context of this schema and thus culture, at whichever level one wishes to consider it, can create constraints for future decision-making since an individual's schema will influence whether certain opportunities are considered realistic or not. This is important when considering the issue of equality of access in education.

Finally, within the concept of *careership* is the idea of a changing life course in which decisions and choices will fluctuate between constants and change. Career paths are not a single and unchanging process. Changes need not be dramatic, nor need they be irrational. They will be situated within the field of the young person and will involve a negotiation of those factors which are relevant to the decision-making of that young person. For Hodkinson et al, *careership* serves to conceptualise career choices as located within an individual's culturally-created *habitus*. However, their theory rejects the idea that the *habitus* does not evolve over time. They suggest the integration of new experiences which will be integrated into that person's schema and influence later choices. This model need not be applied only to decisions about career. The process of making any choice, using this model, is about 'turning-points', and integrating new experiences and opportunities with previous ones. This implies that individuals make only short-term plans rather than having long-term goals as is implied if applying human capital theory.

This phenomenon is further supported by Hodkinson et al.'s notion of *horizons for action*, that is, the space in which actions can be taken, be it an emotional, physical, or cognitive space. Both a person's *habitus* and other outside opportunities have an impact upon a pupil's *horizon for action*. Thus, educational policy, opportunities in the institution or previously attained grades may also have a bearing upon the individual's choices and plans. These, however, create only a backdrop for many other influences. Furthermore, the *horizon for action* may act as a restraint such that certain opportunities are not seriously considered. James and Bloomer (2001) discuss the work of Charlesworth (2000) who studied a group of some of the poorest people in Rotherham. In spite of their situation, little effort was made to challenge or break out of it. In a similar vein, Wertsch (1991) suggests that constraints, whether externally or internally-determined, may not be perceived as such since individuals tend to focus upon their present and existing situation without

understanding that one's culture or place in history creates a form of boundary. This may also be evident within more structural influences such as class, gender and ethnicity which are discussed further below.

The role of the individual as an active member of the educational process has been investigated by Hodkinson and Bloomer (2000) who have considered pupil dispositions in relation to learning processes. They suggest that membership of a given school or college leads to a forging of values between staff and pupils, such that a particular institutional disposition develops. Thus social relations serve to create and nurture a particular type of ethos. The consequence of this, however, is that those who do not, or cannot, contribute towards this growing community may find themselves excluded and may find themselves with less support or fewer opportunities. This too has implications for the issue of equality of access, both in terms of whether certain pupils become excluded during their education, and in terms of whether certain institutions choose to market themselves to certain types of clientele. This again draws attention to the fine line between outside constraints in influencing decisions and the actual role of the individual in creating opportunities. It is likely that the propensity for an educational ethos to develop may also vary across culture as well. Taking Bourdieu's concept of *field* in which each stakeholder brings capital to the game, one might argue that pupils have considerably less power than other forces in upper secondary education. Moreover, even certain pupils have less power than other pupils since they bring with them different resources. This falls in line with Bourdieu's notion of *cultural capital*.

As has been touched on already, individual disposition is another area in which the agency of the student has been examined. Hodkinson and Bloomer's (2000) study of Stockingham Sixth Form highlights how young people's approach to learning was largely a result of the social and cultural experiences which they brought with them to upper secondary. Again, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is a useful theoretical tool. A study by Frykholm and Nitzler (1993), examining the differing dispositions of students in different vocational programmes, also illustrates the importance of students' earlier experiences. Frykholm and Nitzler, drawing on Bourdieu's work, use the term *notion* to refer to an individual's means of structuring the world and how they come to interpret and understand their environment.

What both these studies find is that whilst the students are *agents*, their *agency* is tightly caught up with the agency of their teachers and the institutions in which they are studying. Hodkinson and Bloomer suggest that a shared understanding develops through the interactions of pupils with each other, and with staff. Frykholm and Nitzler claim that students with a certain disposition will seek out others with similar dispositions. In practical terms this means that those who are inclined towards a particular way of perceiving the world will choose to follow similar programmes of study. This includes the teachers' structures of thought which are specific to each programme.

This has implications for social reproduction within society. Frykholm and Nitzler note that the teacher will influence and direct the nature and content of the classroom. This will be largely determined by the nature of the course and the level in society at which that particular field of education is directed. For example, those choosing to study mechanics, a vocational course, will be directed to the lower levels of society, whilst those studying theoretical courses will be directed towards the higher levels of society. Thus norms are conveyed through the teachers through their practice, albeit unconsciously. When pupils are gathered together, whether within a school, or even within a class, a social field is formed and certain dominating structures of thought will be established. This leads to some forms of homogenization in which those with shared *habitus* and *notions* come to dominate and may serve to exclude those with differing perspectives.

2.2 Structural Factors

The work of Bourdieu has been used heavily to explain the perceptions and actions of individual pupils through the concept of *habitus*. Collectively, the research suggests that individual's make decisions based upon some form of internal schema which is created through a whole series of experiences, be they historical, cultural, present-day, aspirations for the future, and so on. The schema is continually changing and may even be influenced or constrained by the environment in which the pupil is operating. The discussions above focussed upon the classroom or school ethos. However, in line with this view, there is the possibility to integrate structural factors. If individual's perceptions are heavily influenced by their background and experiences, then factors such as class, gender and ethnicity are all likely to contribute as well. Indeed, Bourdieu suggests that such structures are socially created and internalised within an individual's *habitus*. It should be noted, however, that he has been criticised for being overly determinist in his approach, particularly given his focus upon individual agency. For the purposes of this study, such a conflict is not considered problematic since aspects of Bourdieu's work are utilised rather than fully embracing the whole 'theory'. Furthermore, much of the research in decision-making and structural influences focuses upon opportunities and personal identity within the realms of various background factors which need not be in contradiction with the notion of *habitus*.

The issue of *decision-making* within current literature and the impact of background factors as structural constraints are largely in relation to the transition from upper secondary into higher education rather than from compulsory to post-compulsory. Thus, there may be issues relevant to upper secondary which are neglected as a result of this. It seems reasonable, however, to believe that many aspects will relate to the broader context of 'continued education' and, therefore, will be relevant to both points of transition. For this reason, and working within the constraints of current literature, this section refers almost exclusively to higher education. Furthermore, the literature is drawn from research carried out within a UK context as a result of limited access to Norwegian

resources. England and Norway are very different countries (see Chapter Four) and so any theoretical foundation drawn based upon English literature must be applied tentatively to the Norwegian case. Indeed, where Green (1990), in his study of England, France and the United States, suggests that England is the most prominent country in its use of schooling by certain groups to dominate over other social groups, Vormeland describes Norwegian education as focusing upon individual development – "The Norwegian belief in education as a democratic right is most clearly visible in the wide range of pedagogical opportunities to anyone regardless of socio-economic background, religion, gender, ethnic background or locality. Learning and opportunities for personal development are to be accessible to everyone". (1993:207). An additional section provides a brief discussion of Norwegian society in relation to gender, class and race to counter any biases (see Appendix 1) and such information suggests that, as in England, Norwegian ideals of equality may not be entirely straightforward. It is with all these considerations in mind that the discussion continues.

Consideration of the possible structural constraints is particularly important given current discourses regarding social exclusion within society and the impact continued education might have upon this. Increased participation in post-compulsory and higher education is perceived by governments as a means of shaping a civilised society whilst also addressing issues of disaffection and low levels of literacy. Continued education has also been associated with greater personal benefits such that individuals may meet their full potential both in terms of their abilities and in terms of their future income. However, as Ball et al note, "....as access becomes democratised then internal differentiation and differential rates of completion appear to become more significant in relation to social differentiation" (2002:54). Furthermore, the recent political focus upon individualisation tends to ignore the importance of structural factors in the opportunities available to various students. Thus the concept of meritocracy comes to the fore with pupils achievements attributed solely to their own personal abilities and efforts. This means that those who do not 'succeed' in society do so because of their own failings whilst those who do are justifiably rewarded. In addition, increased participation has contributed heavily towards what has been referred to as the 'credential inflation' – the need for more and more qualifications in order to attain the same level of standing and employment within society. This has direct implications for those from subordinate groups within society whose access to education may be hindered.

It would be foolish to ever conceptualise an individual's identity as based only upon a single persona, for example, as a female pupil, or a black pupil. Individuals may well identify with a range of background factors, the most commonly referred to being class, gender, and ethnicity. Many authors refer to 'multiple identities'; in writing about gender Wood captures the point succinctly – "Many factors contribute to gender differences in learning and achievement, and it is difficult to isolate gender from a wider network of influences, including ethnicity, sexuality, class,

and ability/disability" (2003:366). Similarly, Reay (1998), in writing about working-class participation in higher education draws attention to the tendency to focus on 'binaries', that is, male and female, black and white, working-class and middle-class, rather than recognising that participation is, in fact, underpinned by multiple factors.

Making the decision to continue one's education beyond compulsory attendance, and possibly into higher education, carries with it various risks. Students are required to make decisions about where to study, what to study, how to finance their studies, as well as facing a whole host of insecurities concerned with social factors. The difficulty associated with structural factors is that the opportunities and available choices are not evenly distributed throughout society. For example, Archer and Hutchings (2000) suggest that access to higher education is a more difficult and costly choice for working-class pupils than middle-class pupils. They note that even when levels of achievement are held constant, differences in higher education participation between working-class and middle-class pupils of the same ability remain. Furthermore, Reay (2001) notes that the percentage of pupils achieving the five grades A-C at GCSE is lower amongst the working classes which, in turn, limits future options.

The differential risks, associated with the working classes and middle classes and choosing to study in higher education, are well-researched. A common line of thought is that working-class pupils hold different values to their middle-class counterparts; the working-classes believe that increased levels of education will not impact upon future work prospects whereas the middle-classes believe it to be vital. Ball et al (2002), however, suggest that this view fails to consider the entire picture, and focus upon the possibility of explanations at a local level. They refer to an 'institutional habitus' - "....perceptions and expectations of choice are constructed over time in relation to school friends and teachers' views and advice and learning experiences" (2002:58) and Thrupp (1999) suggests that schools develop *habituses* which reflect the socio-economic status of the families attending. These findings fall in line with Hodkinson et al's notion of *horizons of action* and the discussion above.

Archer and Hutchings (2000) suggest that the differential risk may be associated with both a reproduction of class inequalities throughout society, and through mechanisms of exclusion within the system itself. Thus, certain pupils are prevented from making specific choices as a result of institutional constraints, but at the same time, the actual patterns of decision-making are unequal as a result of a pupil's *cultural capital* within their class. *Cultural capital* takes many forms – parental expectations, parental knowledge of the educational system, and access to information generally. Even the way in which a pupil positions him/herself in relation to his class can influence the decision-making process. For example, Archer and Hutchings (2000) note that working-class students often view middle-class students as alien to themselves and perceive universities as the

realm of the middle-classes. This may be because there are few positive images of working-class students studying at university (Reay, 2001), a point also made with regard to black students who are unfamiliar with the image of black men in professional positions (Archer & Yamashita, 2003). Hutchings and Archer (2001) found that working-class respondents held two constructions of higher education - the first being Oxbridge-like and mainly occupied by middle-class students, and the second, the option open to them as working-class students. This construction involved the image of less attractive buildings where students must work harder, must find part-time work to finance their studies, and may only gain access through vocational qualifications which they felt provided them with poorer preparation for degree study than A levels. The option open to them as working-class students was perceived as a means of achieving the benefits of a university education but it was not the 'real' university experience. In many cases, this option was simply 'unthinkable'. This construction of 'us' and 'them' may also be found amongst students from ethnic minority backgrounds who find certain choices are not available to them because certain universities are perceived to be the domain of white students. "The continued dominance of particular (elite) institutions by white people can work to render these institutions 'unthinkable' choices for ethnic minority applicants" (Archer & Hutchings, 2000:561).

In addition to considering the risks of choosing higher education, students need to evaluate the possible long term gains of such an undertaking; "....access is not merely a case of wanting to go, or having adequate qualifications, but the process of 'getting to university' would entail considerable additional risks and financial/other costs" (Archer & Hutchings, 2000:560). In their study of working-class participation rates in higher education, they found that their respondents perceived university life as a time to be endured in order to gain future benefits of a degree. As Archer and Yamashita (2003) found in their study, even those working-class students who aspired to higher education were often unable to progress smoothly. Not choosing to continue their education was often the safest option and pupils were acutely aware of their limits which often served to encourage them to opt out of education. A sense of failure had been internalised from their earlier experiences of education and raising aspirations was often a difficult process. Furthermore, many considered the risk of failure to be high and believed that, as working-class students, they were more likely to fail than their middle-class counterparts. They were also less certain about whether they would be able to utilise their higher education in the future as a result of competition within the work market.

The discussion of structural factors has, thus far, been dominated by the experiences of working-class pupils. Gender and ethnicity, too, impact heavily upon pupil identities and experiences, the opportunities available to them, and the nature of the decisions they make. The literature concerned with gender and ethnicity tend to support the broader argument made by those researchers working with working-class students – specific sub-cultures within society do not share the views and lives

of the dominant group and, consequently, they are disadvantaged, both in terms of the opportunities available to them and in terms of their individual perceptions of themselves within society.

Many writers point to the male persona as an issue both in terms of gender and ethnicity. Phoenix (2002), for example, suggests that masculine subjectivities often contradict the school ethos of doing well. She goes on to say that boys, and particularly African-Caribbean young men, who are often viewed as super-masculine, are caught between what it means to be accepted amongst male peers or amongst those of the same race, and what it means to achieve within school. Consequently, they cannot see themselves as "....free and autonomous or as entirely responsible for optimising their choices and educational chances. That boys are not simply free to make rational choices becomes even clearer if we consider how masculinities and racialisation intersect in their everyday practices" (Phoenix, 2002:509). This differs with female black students who engaged in the dominant image of education in order to perform well but, who were unable to follow the most prestigious routes into higher education and who often chose careers which they knew had been historically open to them (Archer & Hutchings, 2000, Hutchings & Archer, 2001). It is further suggested that the 'male', and in particular the 'male black' behaviour is undesirable learning behaviour and this leads teachers and schools to react differentially towards them. This can lead to unconscious elements of racism within teacher-pupil relations and within the school as a whole (Youdell, 2003).

Gender issues relate to female students as much as males but more in terms of the subject choices available to them. Francis (2000), for example, notes that fewer girls will go on to study A levels and degree courses in the sciences and fewer males will choose the arts. Of those females who do study the sciences, fewer do well in upper secondary or higher education. This may be a reflection of the images within society and how young women perceive their role. Jackson (2003), however, suggests that it may be that female students are more sensitive to feedback from authority and that this can impinge heavily upon their confidence in their own ability and, consequently, the decisions they make for their future. In her study of post-compulsory and university students, males were more likely to be confident in their ability than females, and in some cases overestimated their ability whereas the female students sometimes underestimated their ability. This reduction in confidence was further amplified at university. Jackson suggests that male styles of writing are more favoured in higher education which provides male students with greater positive feedback.

2.3 Identity and decision-making

The previous sections have focused, firstly, upon individual agency and the theoretical concepts which support this thesis, and secondly, upon structural constraints which, in a sense, serve to create the *horizons for action* to which Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) refer. There is, however, a

single and fundamental factor which links both individual action and structural factors within society, and which is crucial to the decision-making process – that of identity. This may be defined as "....neither a representation of something that is fixed nor a representation of deep and profound psychological characteristics that reside within the person, but is concerned with changes, which may be either structural or social, that influence young people" (Lawy, 2003:332). Osborn et al (2003) similarly refer to it as being manifest in the choices an individual makes and how s/he presents him/herself to others. Thus, as Archer (2002) notes, choice and identity are tightly woven concepts. The following discussion is presented as an extension of the issues raised in the previous two sections.

In modern-day literature, Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) have received much attention for their work on the changing identity of individuals within modern societies. It is worth briefly considering their views since they provide a useful backdrop for the remainder of the section. Giddens notes how the influences of modernity have recreated the notion of identity. Traditional ties have been lost forcing individuals to create their own biographies. Deciphering the array of options available and making lifestyle choices such as leisure, music and consumption (Lawy, 2003), become particularly important. Beck (1992) refers to this as 'individualization' – the focus of individuals upon the creation of their new identities, a process encouraged by the political and economic culture of neo-liberalism with its emphasis upon individual choice. The focus upon the individual can lead to the breakdown of comfort zones, protective environments created by small traditional communities in which individuals lived their lives, knowing their place in society and the role associated with it. Thus, the development of individual identity has become a particularly active process, but also a process in which individuals may potentially feel threatened. Ball et al (2000), suggest, in referring to class, the new focus upon the individual may "obscure" structural inequalities. However, Giddens (1995) argues to the contrary in that focusing upon individuals serves to highlight issues of stratification in the resources different individuals hold (Giddens, 1995).

Identity formation is a crucial factor within the lives of young people. Bloomer notes that adolescence, for many, "....is a period of turmoil as they turn to confront problems of their moral, social, cultural, political and sexual identities, in their striving for identities as persons" (1997:151). Similarly, Carter, Bennetts and Carter describe adolescence as characterised by "....individual efforts towards the achievement of societal and cultural goals....developing independence, a sexual identity, recognition of 'self', and a place in society" (2003:225). Identity formation is about an individual's actions, perceptions, decisions, and socialisation into a role, it is all encompassing including the influences of both their local and wider contexts. This complexity is described by Ball et al - "The young people are indeed classes, 'raced', and gendered. But they are also involved in constructing other, not necessarily alternative identities through their consumption patterns and

increasing fetishism in relation to fashion, style, and concern with the body and the self" (2000:6). Thus identity formation is about the whole person within their context, and thus it seems only natural that identity plays a crucial part in any decision-making process.

Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) discuss pupil identity in relation to decision-making. This is in relation to decisions and plans about careers since their study was concerned with the transition from school into employment. Nevertheless, they appear to hold true for other areas of decision-making. Transformations in identity are seen to occur at transitions or *turning points* in one's life and are unlikely to reflect single events; this was touched upon in section 2.1.2. They propose three types of turning point:- *structural* (those determined by society, such as the end of compulsory schooling), *external* (those beyond the individual's control but which force the individual to reconsider their plans), and *self-initiated.* At such transitions, individuals will make decisions and choices and, based upon these, will integrate their new position into their identity. Thus, a pupil who had not believed their self to be particularly bright, then unexpectedly achieves five GCSEs grade A-C and, as a result, chooses to study three A levels, may then begin to perceive themselves as 'capable'. Hodkinson et al also suggest that such *turning points* are interspersed with periods of *routine* or normal life. These routines may also follow one of three patterns – *confirmatory* (reinforcing existing plans and so identity develops as intended), *contradictory* (the original decision is inappropriate leading to either a *self-initiated turning point* or coping strategies), and finally, *socialising* (an original identity is confirmed and the 'normal life' involves becoming socialised into this role).

What Hodkinson and Sparkes' model illustrates is that the actions and socialisation process into a particular identity are part of a continuous process, marked with reinforcements of plans, difficulties, changes to goals, and so forth. Identity formation is, therefore, neither a single event in the lives of the young people, nor an unbroken process in which the individual evaluates who they are, what they want to be, what their preferences and abilities are, how these match up with the options available to them, and then set about achieving it.

Another consideration is the importance of structural factors and how these can shape an individual's identity, thereby impacting upon the decision-making process. This point has already been raised in the previous section. For example, Archer and Hutchings (2000) found that working-class pupils were often deterred from applying to universities because of their middle-class status, whilst Phoenix (2002) observed that masculine identities, and in particular, the identities of African-Caribbean young men, are often in contradiction with notions of achieving, or making choices which were associated with doing well in school. Though educational policy is concerned with individual learning and identities resulting from modern day lifestyles, inequalities persist. Young people may be individuals but they also have a gender, are of a particular race, and a

particular social background, and whilst individual decision-making is highly complex and individualistic as a result of their particular social situations and *habitus*, it remains possible to make very general observations and predictions about the choices which are made based upon structural constraints. Much of the literature suggests that focusing upon the individual obscures these persisting inequalities. After all, if all choices are the responsibility of the individual, then a 'bad choice' cannot be the responsibility of society.

The predictive influence of social inequalities which is referred to in the literature is exemplified by Bloomer and Hodkinson's (1999) typology of 'risk careers'. They suggest that individuals' choices can be categorised by their class, largely as a result of the *cultural capital* they bring with them into the decision-making process. Similarly, Macrae, Maguire and Ball (1997) have established a typology of participation in which pupils are classified as *outsiders, hangers-in, acceptors (notional* and *pragmatic)* and *embedded.* Bloomer and Hodkinson, however, suggest that risk careers only trigger change, they do not determine the nature of the change. Thus individuals may be constrained by their circumstances but that is not to say that they are entirely restricted. This observation highlights the fuzzy boundaries that might exist between identity and background. Does a particular type of decision-making indicate that the pupils make such choices as a result of their identity as a 'working class pupil', for example, or does it simply reflect more practical concerns such as a lower income, and where do these two factors begin and end?

2.4 Adopting a Cultural Approach

It is fundamental to this thesis that it is clear how the relationship of the individual to his/her context is understood. Context – society – culture, are all related terms; in a comparative study they gather increased importance. Moreover, this is a study of decision-making, largely through the perceptions of students from different contexts - different countries, different social backgrounds, different ethnicities, different genders, and a whole host of other background factors which come to shape the local context of individuals. Thus the way in which those students perceive their world, the language they use, their way of understanding what goes on around them, the decisions they make, their plans and aspirations, must be accounted for within a framework that relates the individual to his/her setting.

The topic of culture, defined by Hodkinson and Sparkes as "....the socially-constructed and historically-derived common base of knowledge, values and norms for actions that people grow into and come to take as a natural way of life" (1997:33), has gained impetus in recent years. Although there is a plentiful supply of philosophers and sociologists who have focussed upon culture in some respect (from Aristotle, 384-322BC, to Cooley, 1902, Mead, 1938, and Berger &

Luckmann, 1966) it is perhaps only in the last 30 years, since the 'cognitive revolution' that it has come to the fore in applying it to practice (Bruner, 1996).

2.4.1 Introduction to Socio-Cultural theory

The work of Russian psychologist, Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1978, 1986), has had a significant impact upon the development of cultural theories through the cultural-historical school which he founded with Leont'ev and Luria in the 1920s and early 30s. *Socio-cultural theory* has emerged as that which describes Vygotsky's concern with human activities in cultural contexts, mediated by language and other symbol systems, and his belief that such activities are best understood when placed within their historical development. The construction of individual knowledge is well-known in a number of academic fields, most notably, psychology, sociology and education. Brofenbrenner's (1979) work on the ecology of human development and the work of Bruner (1986, 1990, 1996) in stressing the importance of culture in understanding human behaviour, and in applying a 'cultural psychological' approach to education, are obvious examples. Other theories specifically related to Vygotsky's work include the concepts of *situated cognition* (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989), *cognitive apprenticeship* (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989), *guided participation* and *apprenticeship* (Rogoff, 1990), *peripheral participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991), *distributed cognition (*Salomon, 1993*)*, *cultural psychology* (Cole, 1996), the *fifth dimension* (Brown & Cole, 2002), *activity theory* (Engeström, Miettinen & Punamäki, 1999), and the closely related *socio-cultural theory of mediated action* (Wertsch, 1991, 1998). All of these may be referred to as 'socio-cultural theory' or theories operating within a 'socio-cultural perspective'.

2.4.2 Developments within Socio-Cultural theory

This study is located within an overarching framework of *socio-cultural theory.* Conceptual developments, however, necessitate a more exact position within the network of theories. For this purpose, Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), a closely related theory is adopted. A brief description of the developments within *socio-cultural theory* is given as a prelude to CHAT.

Although many researchers have come to adopt the term *socio-cultural theory* to refer to the importance of context upon the development of an individual's ways of thinking, the theory actually represents two strands of thought, one which focuses upon 'culture' and one which focuses upon 'activity' (van Oers, 2004). The cultural line of thinking is derived from the field of American psychology which was introduced to Vygotsky's work by Michael Cole in the late 1960s. This branch of *socio-cultural theory* became heavily influenced by social anthropology and it is within this area that culture became defined as 'a system of signs and a matter of *meaning* and meaning exchange'. The alternative line of thinking was located within Europe and focused upon

activity. Indeed, this is largely based upon Leont'ev's (1978, 1981) work and *activity theory*. Within this perspective culture became seen as 'a system of meaningful *objects for action'*. Wertsch (1991, 1998) has also contributed heavily to this strand although he has been criticised for his focus upon the individual rather than the community (Engeström, Miettinen & Punamäki, 1999).

More recently, divisions within *socio-cultural theory* are less emphatic, evidenced by the creation of 'The International Society for Cultural and Activity Research' (ISCAR) (van Oers, 2004). Michael Cole pressed for cultural diversity within the theory and, indeed, as *activity theory* became adopted internationally it became more important that it was able to incorporate different 'dialogues and traditions'. Under such pressures, *activity theory* transformed into *Cultural Historical Activity Theory* (CHAT), and as Claxton (2002) notes, it now seeks to recognise all elements within *socio-cultural theory* as legitimate and complementary. Since CHAT captures all the elements of the *socio-cultural* perspective, it provides a useful and, perhaps less vague approach to the issue of locating the individual within their context than simply adopting the more general perspective of *socio-cultural theory*.

2.4.3 Cultural Historical Activity Theory

The theory begins with the premise that societies and their members are interrelated; whilst the culture will shape the development of individual cognitions, so individuals' thoughts and actions will impact upon the stability of the culture or its future development. "As people work, play and solve problems together, so their spontaneous ways of thinking, talking and acting – the ideas that come to mind, the words they choose and the tools they make use of – embody an accumulated set of cultural values and beliefs that have been constructed and refined over previous generations" (Wells & Claxton, 2002:3). The young learn from those who are more experienced – friends, relatives, teachers – through scaffolded learning or what Vygotsky called the 'zone of proximal development'. Through collaboration over an activity individuals learn and adopt the values, skills and knowledge of a given society. Again, this relies upon Vygotsky's theory that everything we learn begins first as something external to us but eventually becomes internalised. Further, during activity, new problems will arise and through collaboration new solutions will be devised which will be applied to other situations, and adopted by other individuals and in this way passed on into the culture as a whole. Lemke notes, "As we learn, we gradually become our villages: we internalize the diversity of viewpoints that collectively make sense of all that goes on in the community. At the same time, we develop values and identities: in small tasks and large projects, we discover the ways we like to work, the people we want to be, the accomplishments that make us proud" (2002:34).

A key feature of the activity will be the artefacts or tools which are used, be they material/manual or semiotic (language, text, graphs, and so forth). Since all human activity is in some way mediated by tools any activity must be defined by three inseparable factors:- the tools available within the environment, the individuals working in collaboration, and the knowledge and skills of the group. Absolutely crucial to the theory is that semiotic tools and, in particular, language, are utilised as a means of understanding experience. Language, as a tool for communication, allows individuals to become involved in dialogue and, in turn, to adopt the culture's ways of thinking. As Tulviste notes, therefore, people in different cultures will think in different ways – "People involved in different kinds of activities, and therefore solving different kinds of tasks, will have different semiotic means or tools provided by the society, and by using different tools, they would think in different ways" (1999:69).

2.4.4 Contextualising Individual Activity

Cultural Historical Activity Theory provides a theoretical foundation for understanding an individual's development and participation within his/her environment. Drawn from a cultural historical perspective, Marianne Hedegaard (1999, 2001) has developed a model (see figure 2) to illustrate the way in which individuals are specifically influenced by their participation in particular institutions, and in society as a whole. This is especially helpful since it provides an explanation of context in ways which are meaningful to this project, that is, the study of pupils in a *school* context and a *national* context. Furthermore, Hedegaard's (2001) model is concerned with '*learning through participation in institutionalised practice*' and thus it has been developed within an educational setting. Her focus is upon 'learning' but, with the exception of her account of *peripheral participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991), this model is equally well applied to participation as 'decision-making'.

Hedegaard's focus is upon societal traditions and institutionalised practice and learning through acting and participating within such traditions. She draws upon the work of Vygotsky (1986), McDermott (1993), Bourdieu (1984) and Lave and Wenger (1991) to create this model. Hedegaard's starting point is with Vygotsky; his work emphasises a need to consider the traditions and application of specific tools (semiotic or otherwise) within specific cultures. She suggests that context can be understood as 'practice traditions', replays of that which have gone on before. She also focuses on the possibility for multiple contexts as a means of highlighting institutional and societal traditions, and upon local contexts and those which are part of a broader influence. For the conceptualisation of local contexts she draws upon McDermott's (1993) model of activity in which the individual and their context cannot be separated. Indeed, in his study of a pupil labelled with learning disabilities, McDermott notes that the term 'learning disabilities' is part of the context in which the child is located rather than in the child himself. He uses the metaphor of a rope to draw

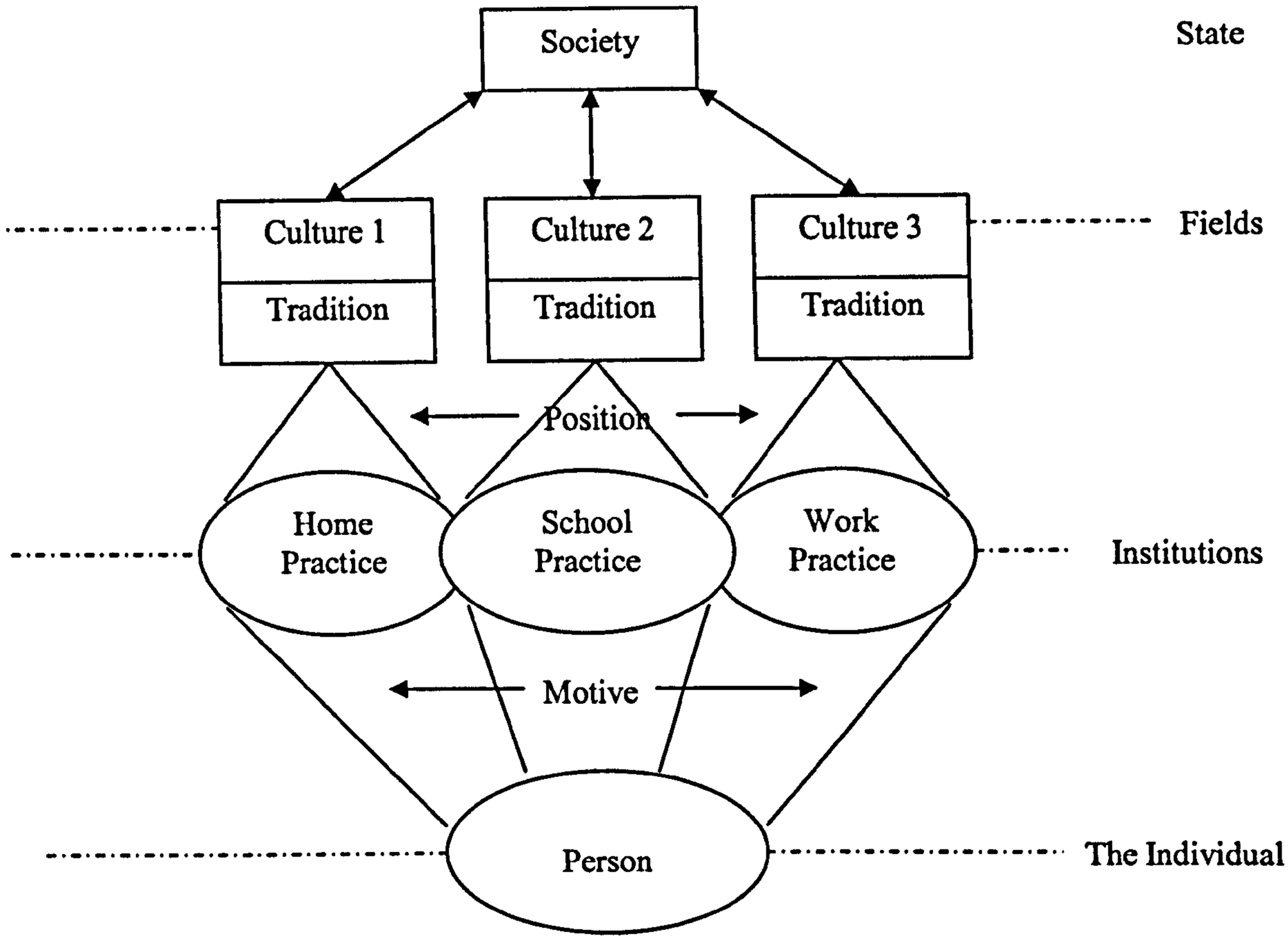
attention to the way in which the individual and their context are, in fact, indistinct. The individual is just one thread but when placed with other threads, a piece of rope (rather than a group of threads) is created.

In order to capture the broader context, Hedegaard draws upon Bourdieu's *field* theory (1984) (see section 2.1.1.2). She notes that this makes it possible to separate society, institutions and individuals, and to identify the cultural fields which operate at each level. At the societal level, economic, juridical and cultural 'capital' direct people's actions leading to different social positions. This leads to differential levels of influence over others within the system. It also explains how individuals may be agents within a system whilst also adopting the dominant knowledge and values of the field. The interactions which occur within these fields are the traditions and structures which are passed from one generation to the next. Furthermore, since individual's hold differential positions within society, their practical participation at an institutional level may be understood differently. She writes, "Different persons participate differently in societal institutions because the meaning of their positions in a cultural field give different meaning to the activity in the concrete institutions" (2001:22). Thus, McDermott and Bourdieu's work both draw attention to the inter-connectedness of individual participation within his or her environment, be it the person acting at a local level within their institutional setting (family, school, work), or the influence of traditions at a societal level.

In developing *activity theory*, Leont'ev (1978) suggested that motives were a key element in determining the actions of individuals. Thus individual agency is a further aspect of participation. Hedegaard's model recognises this when she notes, "From a cultural-historical point of view, learning is an activity situated in institutions where both the participants' motives and the values/meanings associated to traditions contribute to the learning activity" (2001:24). Individuals may be influenced by the traditions in which they participate, but they also contribute to their further development. This approach allows for individual personality and identity to be included in the model. Furthermore, any problems which arise may not be assigned to the individual alone but to the *activity*, the contextual experience within a particular institution and within a particular culture.

As noted, earlier, only the use of Lave and Wenger's theory of *peripheral participation* is inconsistent with a study of decision-making. It would be interesting to consider whether Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson's (1996) theory of *careership* would be a complimentary feature of Hedegaard's model. Indeed, they also drew upon the work of Bourdieu in creating a theory which could explain their findings.

Figure 2 Influence of context upon individual situation



Source: Hedegaard (2001:25).

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused upon the mechanisms by which decisions are made. This focus has led to consideration of both individual agency and structural influences, and as common ground between these, the influence of young people's identities in making decisions. The demands of the study have also required a theoretical foundation which can provide an explanation of individual action within a cultural context. A brief summary of the earlier discussion and its relevance to the study is provided below:-

- Through the work of Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, Bloomer, Ball, and others, and utilising the work of Bourdieu, the suggestion is that individual decision-making is pragmatic, rational, unpredictable, and operates within the context within which an individual lives their life. Bourdieu's notion of ***habitus*** suggests that an individual persona constitutes individual intentions developed within the social setting in which that person has grown and lives. This falls in line with Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson's theory of ***careership*** which suggests that individuals remain constrained by their context, be it their classroom, school, or some other boundary which serves to influence the actions they take. This theoretical outline of individual agency is particularly

important for this study since it provides an account of how pupils might operate uniquely within their educational system, but also draws attention to possible patterns which might arise due to shared contexts, for example, according to their school.

- With regard to structural factors, the main suggestion is that background factors such as gender, class and race serve to contribute to individual identities. In turn, these create an understanding of what may or may not be considered an opportunity for that person. Does s/he believe their experience truly provides wider opportunities within society as a whole? In this study, such issues are explored since, not only can they illuminate the actual decision-making process, but can also demonstrate whether social inequalities persist.

- The issue of individual identity is further examined in relation to both structural factors and the earlier discussion of individual decision-making. It would seem that identity is, perhaps, the most essential element in decision-making.

- The final consideration in the theoretical framework is the comparative nature of this study. For the purpose of clarity, it is best to view the central theoretical framework as ***socio-cultural theory***. Other theories, however, provide a more specific outline of how individuals may be perceived in their environment. Utilising ***CHAT*** and Hedegaard's model of ***learning through participation in institutionalised practice***, individuals and the culture in which they live are considered to be inseparable. The very thought processes of the citizens are heavily influenced by their culture, both through their experiences and through the tools and resources they use in living their lives. Thus the pupils in this study, being domicile in two countries, England and Norway, are likely to perceive and experience choice differentially. They are likely to understand the decision-making process and the opportunities available according to the cultural assumptions and values which underpin their given educational system. This being the case, a comparison of the two will provide information about both the individual process of choice, and about those cultural assumptions.

In general, the theoretical framework underpinning this study draws attention to the importance of context in individual cognition and identities and how this impacts upon decision-making. The selection of such contexts is given particular attention in the design of the study as outlined in the next chapter (see Chapter Three).

Chapter Three - Method and Analyses

This chapter is divided into several sections - the research questions (3.1), the sampling process (3.2), materials (3.3), procedure (3.4), ethical issues (3.5) and, finally, the methods of analyses (3.6). The reader may wish to read this chapter in conjunction with a description given of the English and Norwegian educational systems (see Chapter Four, section 4.4).

The format in which this information is presented may indicate an adherence to more positivist traditions, a position which is rejected since any research into pupil perspective requires a more interpretivist approach. Comparative research, however, creates challenges and places different demands upon the study design from more traditional qualitative research. To use nation states as the unit of analyses introduces a new complexity and thus, if any sense is to be made of the comparison, there must be strict delimitations to the study. Such delimitations should not be interpreted as indicative of a particular philosophical stance, but rather a more pragmatic influence in addressing those problems which are characteristic of comparative research, namely, conceptual equivalence, equivalence of measurement, linguistic equivalence and sampling (Osborn, 2004, Osborn et al, 2003).

3.1 Research Questions

1. What are the stated aims and purposes of policy in upper secondary education in England and Norway and how are these achieved?

2. What are the decision-making experiences of pupils in upper secondary education in England and Norway concerned with educational and career choices, and what are the major similarities and differences between the two countries?

3. How do factors such as gender, race and class affect the experiences of pupils in upper secondary education in England and Norway, particularly in relation to choice and access?

4. To what extent are *national educational policy*, its *implementation* and *pupils' perspectives* socio-cultural constructs, and what might be learnt from contextualising upper secondary education?

3.2 Sampling Process

3.2.1 Country and City

The choice of England* and Norway was purposeful. Since one of the aims of this study was to examine the relevance of socio-cultural constructs within upper secondary education it was necessary to choose two nation states. One of the central issues concerned with comparative research is that in many instances those who conduct the research have very little knowledge of the country which they are visiting (Chambers, 1997). Implicit assumptions and ways of perceiving the world may, therefore, go unidentified and have an impact upon the validity of the research. Having previously lived in Norway, and having carried out research in both countries, I felt that such a problem might be counter-balanced. Moreover, with knowledge of the two countries, it was evident that the educational goals and the structure of the educational systems (see Chapter Four) were very different and might, therefore, provide a particularly interesting and useful comparison.

Within these countries, Bristol and Oslo were chosen on the basis of their comparability. Similar in size, with populations of 4-500,000 inhabitants, the infrastructure is not dissimilar. Both consist of a number of village-like areas requiring extensive transport systems to interconnect the different regions. At the same time, both Oslo and Bristol have clearly defined centres. Both cities are industrialised, with working ports, but are surrounded by extensive areas of countryside. Both have a wide variety of populations in terms of ethnicity and socio-economic background, thereby creating the potential for different educational institutions with very different experiences and outlooks.

* England was deliberately chosen, as opposed to the United Kingdom (UK). It was felt that the UK may be too diverse in terms of schools, qualifications, and other key elements within this study, thus compromising the possibility of establishing comparable samples.

3.2.2 Institutions

Within England, the diversity of institutions provides a significant array of opportunity. The three main forms of institution which provide upper secondary education are 'sixth forms' within maintained schools (28.1% of the 16-18 year cohort), independent schools (6.3%) and further education in the form of 'sixth form colleges' and 'colleges of further education' (36.1%) (DfEE, 1999). *Sixth Forms* within maintained schools and *Colleges of FE* were selected for this study. The reasons for this were twofold. Firstly, only a minority of students attend independent schools and, therefore, such data may not be particularly representative of student experiences. Secondly, independent schools and sixth form colleges may not be particularly comparable to Norwegian schooling since, in Norway, there is no specific private school tradition. Independent schools represent the private sector of schooling in England and, sixth form colleges, whilst not private, were historically grammar schools with many retaining the ethos of private education (Hodkinson

& Bloomer, 2000). Schools of a particular religion were also excluded since these were not deemed to be comparable with the Norwegian system.

In Norway, 'further education schools' were selected (*Videregående Skole*). These are the only form of institution providing upper secondary education. Historically these were divided into those which were typically academic in nature (*gymnaset*) and those which were typically vocational (*yrkesskole*). Nowadays, the majority of schools offer a range of both types of course but many continue to specialise. Of 28 *videregående skole* in Oslo, the School Agency, *Skoleetaten,* describes 5 as providing vocational courses, 11 academic and 8 a mix. Four schools offer special education. In the English setting, Colleges of FE provide both academic and vocational courses, but for historical and practical reasons, sixth forms continue to offer mainly academic courses. Such a situation in both countries influenced the choice of institutions for this study.

Of the 28 schools in Oslo, 12 were excluded since they either offered special education or were considered to be problematic in a comparative context. From those remaining, 10 schools were approached according to the categorisation of 'academic', 'vocational', and 'academic and vocational' as provided by the local education authority, and according to the socio-economic status of the area in which the school was located. This was determined using data from the local council (*Statistisk Sentralbyrå*, 2001) with regard to the percentage of claimants of social benefits within each township of Oslo. For the purposes of this study, each township was ranked according to this data with the top 12 being from more affluent areas and the remaining 13, less affluent. Six schools, meeting these criteria, were able to participate in the study.

In Bristol, there were two Colleges of FE, both of which were selected. Of 20 secondary schools, seven secondary schools met the criteria. None of these schools were able to help with the research. Instead, 2 secondary schools, located in the outskirts of Bristol city but from the county of South Gloucestershire, rather than Bristol county, were contacted. These 2 schools were both able to participate in the study. One of these schools was located in a middle-high socio-economic area and one in a lower socio-economic area. The socio-economic area of the schools was determined by the description given in their latest inspection reports.

3.2.3 Participants

There were key differences between the educational systems of the two countries; it was important to consider these in deciding which groups of pupils would be comparable as participants in this research project.

In the first place, *participation* may be defined in very different ways. Figures derived from government statistics in England indicate that at the end of 2003 72.4% of pupils remained in *full-*

time education beyond the age of 16 (DfES, 2004a). This figure rose to 87.1% when participation rates include *training,* and to 91% if the definition included *employment.* 72.4% is taken, here, as the 'staying on' rate in post-compulsory education in England. In Norway, 96.2% of pupils made the transition from lower secondary to upper secondary *education* in 2000 (*Statistisk Sentralbyrå*, 2002). It should be noted that this figure includes those who went on to study at a folk high school. However, in 2003, those studying in folk high school represented only 2.57% of those in upper secondary education (*Statistisk Sentralbyrå*, 2004a) thereby suggesting that the vast majority of pupils will enter more traditional upper secondary courses.

In considering the local staying on rates, these proved to be slightly higher than national rates. In Oslo, the rate attending upper secondary or folk high school was 94.9% in 2000 (*Statistisk Sentralbyrå*, 2002) and in Bristol, at the end of 2001, 73% of 16-17 year olds were in full-time education and 85% in education and training (DfES, 2004b).

England and Norway have different ways of structuring their upper secondary qualifications. In England it is anticipated that pupils will study at Level 3 which typically means two or three A levels or an Advanced Certificate in Vocational Education (AVCE) although there are a vast range of other vocational and professional qualifications available including the BTEC National Diploma. Upon successful completion of their courses such qualifications give an individual the opportunity to apply for entry into higher education. In 2003, 51.8% of 19 year olds had a Level 3 qualification (DfES, 2004c). It is also interesting to note that in 2002/03, 83% of 16-18 year olds in full-time education were enrolled on academic courses at Level 3 compared with 17% of pupils enrolled on vocational courses (DfES, 2004d). These figures were 95% and 5% respectively for 19 year olds and older.

In Norway, the distinction is made between academic and vocational subjects rather than levels. Of those who continue in education post-16, 51.0% will choose to study the academic line of study and 49.0% vocational (*Statistisk Sentralbyrå*, 2004a). Successful completion of the academic leads to the General Study Competence (*Generell Studiekompetanse)* which gives pupils the opportunity to apply for entry into higher education. Those who complete the vocational line of study may become an apprentice (*lærling*) as a means of achieving the Letter of Proficiency (*Fagbrevet*). Alternatively, they may study an additional year to provide them with the Study Competence. A further option for vocational students is to select a vocational course where academic subjects are integrated into the vocational curriculum. Approximately a fifth of vocational pupils, that is, 10% of all pupils in upper secondary education, will choose a vocational course with the possibility of attaining the academic General Study Competence and thus around 61% of pupils choose an option that might later allow them to enter university. Having taken account of drop out rates (approximately 5%) and failure to pass exams (approximately 11%), 47% of pupils completing in

2003 achieved the Study Competence and thus the possibility for entry into higher education (pers com Sadiq Kwesi Boateng, Consultant, *Statistisk Sentralbyrå*, 26-10-04).

The table below provides a basic outline of the levels of involvement in upper secondary education in the two countries based upon the data presented above. However, it would be misleading to present them has straightforward comparisons. For example, the English staying on rate appears particularly low compared to Norway. The English data separates education and training whereas within the Norwegian system of apprenticeship, education and training are intrinsically linked. Were we to focus on the English data for 'education *and* training' the staying on rate would rise to 87.1% and, therefore, would not be as markedly different from the Norwegian.

Table 1 Comparison of key statistics in England and Norway

	England **%**	**Norway** **%**
Participation rates in upper secondary education at aged 16	72.4	96.2
Attainment of qualification giving access to higher education	51.8	47.0
Academic/vocational split in choice of upper secondary courses	83.0/17.0	51.0/49.0
Persons aged 16 or above with university level qualification*	25.5	23.5

* DfES (2004c) and SSB (2004b), not presented in earlier discussion.

The difference between the two countries made it problematic in deciding which groups of pupils would be comparable for this project. Should the selection criterion be governed by the nature of the course or the level of study? Furthermore, in both countries there were practical constraints in terms of access to pupils studying vocational courses. To overcome such limitations it was decided to focus upon the *opportunity* afforded by the qualification and the *location* of their upper secondary education. Thus, pupils who were *school-based and studying courses which would give them access to higher education* were identified, namely, pupils studying for a Level 3 qualification in England, and those studying for the General Study Competence in Norway. In setting this as a criterion, any potential difficulties arising from the differential staying on rates were overcome. It meant that although a greater number of Norwegians were studying in upper secondary education at the onset of upper secondary schooling, the same 'high achievers' subset of this group were accessed in both countries. This was further supported by the grades of those entering a Level 3/General Study Competence course (see Appendix 9) which were higher than entry into other upper secondary courses. As noted above, high staying on rates in Norway include a substantial number of pupils who study at a lower level than those participating in this study. Thus the

differential staying on rates are a reflection of how each country caters to the less able pupils within the system, an issue beyond the remit of this project.

A further consideration was the year of study of the pupils. It was decided to contact pupils who were in the *final year of their study*. This was done to ensure that pupil experiences were comparable, both in terms of the level of study and the processes of choice and decision-making experienced. The duration of upper secondary schooling is different in the two countries with two years in England and three in Norway. In England pupils may begin a Level 3 course, for example, the AS, but then choose not to continue with it in their second year. In Norway, the first of the three years is referred to as a foundational year, and is only 'advanced' in years two and three. Thus, only in choosing to select 'final year' pupils could any measure of comparability be guaranteed.

Having established which pupils to contact within the limitations of the two countries and their educational systems, one now turns to other factors which might influence a student's perspective, namely, their socio-economic background, ethnicity, gender, or course of study. Since there are limitations in which background factors can be controlled through the selection of an institution, this was more a consideration when contacting individual pupils. Whilst this study does not lay claim to externally valid findings and, therefore, does not seek to represent *all* students, it was important to explore the possibility of different voices within the student body and to make some attempt at creating a sample which incorporated a range of viewpoints. For this reason, data was gathered in the form of brief questionnaires which allowed for purposeful selection of a subset of students who were later interviewed.

A representative from each school/college (for example, head of sixth form or career advisor) was also asked to participate in a short interview. The purpose of this was essentially to establish the ethos of the institution, but also to establish institutional data such as where most students studied prior to entering upper secondary education and how many pupils successfully completed their courses. Selection was opportunistic and depended largely upon the co-operation and willingness of the institution to name a person who was able to help with the research. A number of additional interviews were carried out with representatives from lower secondary schools in order to explore the point of transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education; these were mainly guidance counsellors.

3.3 Materials

Mini-disk and detachable microphone; Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS); EXCEL; Upper Secondary pupil questionnaire (Appendix 2), College student questionnaire (Appendix 3); *Videregående skole spørreskjema* (Appendix 4); Upper Secondary interview schedule (Appendix 5); School Representative interview schedule (Appendix 6); Ethical Code (Appendix 7), Norwegian translation of ethical code (Appendix 8) and Follow-Up Schedule (figure 21, Appendix 15).

3.3.1 The Questionnaires

The central purpose of the questionnaires was as a means of selecting pupils for interview, based largely upon their background factors. One section of the questionnaire, therefore, focused upon issues such as accommodation, ethnicity, parental education and employment, and the education of older siblings.

Many students provided information which was potentially interesting and worthy of further investigation. To ensure that the volume of the data did not become unwieldy, however, it was decided to select pupils according to seven specific criteria:-

- country or residence (England, Norway)
- gender (male, female)
- socio-economic background (Class I/II, Class III, Class IV/V)
- nature of the course/s studied (academic, vocational, mix)
- nationality (British, Norwegian, other)*
- ethnicity (white, other)*
- comment (an interesting or unusual perspective)

* Whilst the category of nationality naturally fell into three classifications (British, Norwegian and other), the category of ethnicity naturally fell into two classifications (white and non-white). Such classifications were data driven.

A rating for socio-economic status was established using the UK Registrar General's Social Classification. Parental occupations were rated and the highest class was used as the family's classification. For the purpose of this study, classifications I and II (Professional or Managerial/Technical), and classifications IV and V (semi-skilled or unskilled) were collapsed. Thus the study recognised three classifications - Class I/II, Class III, and Class IV/V. All other classifications were labelled as 'Other'. It should be noted, however, that the allocation of pupils to Class III was not always straightforward, largely because many occupations fell near the boundaries of neighbouring class marks, or because the information given in the questionnaires was misleading. For example, if a pupil gave a job title that did not cohere with their parent's work

activities nor their education. The distinction was more clear-cut for the higher and lower classifications.

In most instances, the selection was made according to how *typical* or *atypical* the pupils were compared to their classmates within each institution. It was considered misleading to present all criteria as equally 'represented' within each institution since, even if it were possible, it would create an artificial sense of uniformity amongst the pupils.

In addition to information about the pupil's backgrounds, the questionnaire afforded an opportunity to explore the choices and decision-making experiences of a large number of pupils. These question items arose from findings earlier pilot studies and which addressed issues pertaining to the study research questions. This information, as a larger data set, was intended to triangulate with any findings that arose from the interviews.

The questions in this section were presented as a Likert-type scale with statements requiring a degree of agreement or disagreement, for example, "Upper secondary education is very important if I am to get a job in the future" or "I think my studies in upper secondary are very difficult compared to my previous education". Participants were 'forced' to form an opinion with no neutral option available. Questions were also worded positively, negatively and neutrally in order to prevent pupils from developing a pattern of responding.

Although there were two different versions of the questionnaire, and three if the translation is included, (College, Upper Secondary and *Videregående skole*), these only differed in their wording when it was necessary to ensure their relevance to the particular group of pupils who were completing them.

3.3.2 The Interview Schedules

The aim of the pupil interviews was to establish the views and experiences of participants from a range of backgrounds, such that it was possible to answer the research questions. The design of the interview schedule was considered carefully in order to create a context in which the participants felt able to give a full and personal account of their lives as pupils.

The interview was unstructured with key questions and prompts to guide the 'conversation' (Gillham, 2000). Questions, based upon earlier pilot studies, were worded in such a way as to encourage narrative, for example, "Thinking back over your education, before you began upper secondary, what did you enjoy most about school?" Narrative is a crucial means of approaching individual action, meaning, intention, situation and 'psychic reality' (Bruner, 1986) and, in the form of biographies, has played a significant part in research concerned with life-histories giving the

narrator's socio-cultural environment, individual perspective, and a time dimension for the self and the society (Antikainen, Houtsonen, Kauppila & Huotelin, 1996). Thus, it was considered a useful approach in this study.

Since the interviewees were selected on the basis of their characteristics and responses in the questionnaires, it was possible to tailor the interview to the participant to some extent. At the end of the interview, participants were asked about any point of special interest which had arisen in the questionnaire. They were also asked if it would be possible to contact them on a later occasion and if they could provide contact details.

Two other interview schedules were designed, one for the school representatives and one for the guidance counsellors. These were more structured since the need for narrative and dialogue was less important. The information gained in these interviews was intended only to be supplementary to the pupils' data.

3.3.3 Language Issues

'Language' was a concern throughout the study and, in general, is often a problem in comparative research. It is not simply an issue in terms of communication on a basic level, but impacts upon the assumptions and attitudes of both researcher and participant/s.

A number of steps were taken to guard against unnecessary bias in this research. Firstly, a native Norwegian was consulted throughout, not only in terms of translations, but also in interpretation of data, policy, and the structure of the educational system. Secondly, the questionnaires, interviews, and ethical code were all translated from the 'original' English version into Norwegian with the native Norwegian. To ensure conceptual equivalence, problematic concepts were discussed and a new version of both the English and Norwegian versions of the questionnaire produced. The Norwegian version was then translated back into English to verify that its meaning continued to parallel the English version.

Thirdly, efforts were made to establish a relationship with the pupils in order to create an atmosphere of negotiation in the interviews. This involved meeting with the pupils in order to explain my research, and to administer the questionnaires. Not only did this ensure that pupils felt more comfortable with me when I later returned to interview them on an individual basis, but it had a great impact upon return-rates of the questionnaires. It is not possible to quote specific figures as it was not practically possible to administer or collect all of them in person. Where it was possible, however, no single pupil refused to complete it. In terms of the interviews, pupils were relaxed and apparently honest with me and this allowed for a process of discussion that allowed questions to be asked and clarified, thereby attempting to overcome any culturally-bound assumptions.

Finally, I continued to immerse myself in the Norwegian culture through frequent and lengthy visits, contact with the Norwegian people, and participation in local customs, as well as making progress in learning the language. In so doing, it is hoped that the often quoted problem of ethnocentricity might be overcome.

3.4 Procedure

The following section outlines the procedures involved in carrying out the study. Figure 3 illustrates the stages involved, beginning in Spring 2001 with the first pilot study, through to Spring 2005 with Phase III.

3.4.1 Delimitations

Quite apart from testing the questionnaire and interview schedule, the pilot studies provided an opportunity for understanding the educational systems of the two countries so that the design of the study was logical and practicable to both and so that the two samples were comparable. In this way, the pilot studies were a crucial part of the deciding process in planning how the study was to be conducted and delimiting what was and was not a feature of the research.

There were a number of possibilities for examining pupils' perspectives in upper secondary education though all demanded that the pupils had some experience of evaluating choices and decisions. Those designs which were considered involved questioning those who had *recently* moved into upper secondary education, questioning those who were about to *leave*, following pupils as they made the transition into upper secondary and then into higher education as a *longitudinal study*, or even tracking a sample of pupils who had *not continued* their education beyond 16. Differences in the duration of upper secondary schooling in England and Norway, the point at which pupils make their choices, and practical reasons of time and access tempered these possibilities. Thus the most sensible option became the study of pupils who were in the *final* year of upper secondary education. Furthermore, again for practical reasons, the study was *school-based*, thereby restricting the study to those pupils who had chosen academic courses, or vocational courses that had a substantial component within the school/college making it possible for teachers to arrange my visits. Questionnaire and interview data were also collected from a substantial number of lower secondary pupils in England but the full analysis and interpretation of the findings was beyond the scope of this thesis.

Figure 3 Outline of phases of study

Pilot Study 1

Spring 2001
7 institutions (3 English, 4 Norwegian)
10 questionnaires, 17 interviews

Pilot Study 2

Autumn 2002 - Spring 2003
4 institutions (3 English, 1 Norwegian)
14 questionnaires, 5 interviews

Main Study - making contact

Summer 2002 - Spring 2003
10 institutions (4 English, 6 Norwegian)

Phase I - Questionnaires

Autumn 2002 - Spring 2003
270 pupils (112 English, 158 Norwegian)

Phase II - Interviews

Winter 2002 - Summer 2003
68 pupils (31 English, 37 Norwegian)
10 school representatives (3 English, 7 Norwegian)

Phase III - Follow up

Autumn 2004 - Spring 2005
54 pupils (25 English, 29 Norwegian)
6 guidance counsellors (2 English, 4 Norwegian)

3.4.2 Questionnaires

The process of contacting the 10 institutions began in the Autumn of the school year 2002/2003; difficulty in gaining access meant that some of the participating schools were not contacted until February 2003. They were asked if I could administer the questionnaire to a group of approximately 30 students. For four of the schools, however, it was more practical to send the questionnaires by post. All questionnaires, a total of 270, were collected between October 2002 and March 2003.

In the smaller institutions, such as the secondary school sixth forms, it was possible to gather data on all upper secondary students studying at an advanced level. In the larger institutions, however, specific classes were targeted, for example, tutor groups. Which class was made available was a practical decision made by the school/college. The great advantage of visiting the schools was that it provided an opportunity to explain the purpose of the research and to answer any questions the pupils might have.

3.4.3 Interviews

From those who responded to the questionnaire a smaller sample, numbering 68 in total, were selected for interview. In most instances, participants were contacted via their institution rather than directly. Interviews were conducted between November 2002 and May 2003. Although the Norwegian participants were interviewed in English, the nature of the discussion did not provide any problems. Furthermore, my knowledge of Norwegian allowed for some leeway. The participants were encouraged to ask for an explanation where they were unclear about the question rather than making a guess. All interviews, typically 30-40 minutes in duration, were recorded and selectively transcribed.

Interviewees were followed up 12 or more months later by telephone to establish if their intended choices had been substantiated, how their perceived opportunities had changed and their general opinions about their changing experience of upper secondary schooling (Phase III, Appendix 15).

The table below illustrates the distribution of cells for all aspects of the data collection. The co-operation of each institution, individual teachers and pupils, and practical constraints played an important part in determining the final size of the cohort.

Table 2 Study design - distribution of cells for upper secondary data

	ENGLAND				NORWAY					
	Secondary School (with sixth form)		College of Further Education		Videregående Skole (academic)		Videregående Skole (vocational)		Videregående Skole (ac/voc)	
School/college	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Socio-ec status	High	Low	n/a	n/a	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Questionnaires	22	37	34	19	31	21	17	25	27	37
Interviews	6	8	8	9	7	6	5	6	6	7
Follow-up	5	8	4	8	7	4	4	4	4	6
School Reps	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	1
Guid Couns	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

As noted above, a representative from each institution was also asked to participate. Of the 10 upper secondary institutions, 16 representatives were interviewed; 10, typically those in positions of management, during Phase II and a further 6 during Phase III. During this latter phase, when interviewees were contacted a second time, it was decided to explore the role of the guidance counsellor in providing support to pupils making the transition from lower secondary into upper secondary education. Four schools were contacted in order to gain this information; the English counsellors were employees at the two Sixth Forms which had participated earlier in the study (see table 2 above) whilst the Norwegian counsellors were employees at two randomly selected lower secondary schools in Oslo. All interviews with school representatives were approximately 60-90 minutes in duration. Two additional interviews were conducted with representatives from the English organisation, Connexions.

The 10 institutions and all interviewees quoted in the thesis were each given a pseudonym to protect their identity and thereby maintain confidentiality. Furthermore, schools and smaller institutions which were referred to in the interviews were also given pseudonyms. The names of larger institutions or cities, however, were retained as it was deemed unnecessary as a means of protecting the identities of the participants. To change so many contextual markers within the text was also a potentially confusing option. The pseudonyms for the schools are as follows:-

Figure 4 List of school pseudonyms

Institution	Pseudonym
A	Eddington School
B	Stepleigh School
C	Brookfield College (City Campus, Wipton Campus)
D	Hipford College
E	Blåfoss *Videregående Skole* (vgs)
F	Vannsjø vgs
G	Sæther vgs
H	Nesby vgs
I	Oppstrøm vgs
J	Solfjell vgs

These schools are presented in **bold** throughout the remainder of the thesis, with the Norwegian schools also being written in ***italics***.

3.4.4 Documentary data

The data collection involved contacting various organisations and government bodies, for example, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and *Kirke og undervisningsdepartementet* (KUF), now known as the *Utdannings og forskningsdepartementet* (UFD), as well as utilising government websites such as that of the DfES and Norway's 'Odin'. The primary documents were as follows:-

3.4.4.1 England

- CBI Towards a skills revolution (1989)
- White Paper, Forging Ahead (1995)
- Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds (The Dearing Report) (1996)
- The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain (1998)
- Green Paper, Extending opportunities, raising standards: Choice and excellence – A vision for post-14 education (2002)
- Green Paper, 14-19 Extending opportunities, raising standards: summary (2002)
- White Paper, Schools – Schools Achieving Success (Ch 4 'Meeting individual talents and aspirations at 14-19) (2001)
- Education Act (2002)
- Report on 14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform (The Tomlinson Report) (2004)
- White Paper 14-19 Education and Skills (2005)

3.4.4.2 Norway

- Brochure - Reform '94, Upper Secondary and Vocational Education (1994)
- Brochure - Reform '94: Upper Secondary Education in Norway after the introduction of Reform '94 (1994)
- Brochure - From Apprentice to Skilled Worker, Vocational Training under Reform '94 in Norway (1994)
- Grunnskolereformen (1997)
  (The Compulsory School Reform, Reform 97)
- Læreplan for grunnskole, videregående opplæring og voksenopplæring (1997)
  (Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education in Norway)
- St meld nr 42 (1997-1998) Kompetansereformen
  (White Paper, The Competence Reform)
- The Competence Reform Report No. 42 to the Storting (1997-1998): Summary and Conclusions (Summary in English)
- Lov om grunnskolen og den videregående opplæringa (opplæringslova) (1999)
  (Act concerning primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education, The Education Act)
- The Development of Education 1991-2000 - National Report from Norway (2002)

3.4.5 Contextual data

Two additional sources of data collection pertained to the contextual setting of the study. The first included the collection of information relating to the English and Norwegian *national* cultures - historic, economic and political - and information about the educational systems, including curriculum traditions. These findings are presented in Chapter Four. The second source of data was concerned with the *school* cultures and includes the collection of institutional documents and casual observations made during visits to the schools. These are reported in Appendix 9.

3.5 Ethical Issues

All participants in this research were ensured confidentiality and anonymity, and care was taken to ensure that their identity was not disclosed by virtue of the information they gave. Before becoming involved in the study, all pupils were sent a brief description of its purpose, and an abbreviated copy of Bristol University's ethical code, in English or Norwegian, where appropriate (see Appendices 7 and 8). Those who were interviewed also received a list of the key points to be discussed beforehand. All aspects of the research were carried out on the basis of informed consent. Participants were told that if they felt uncomfortable about being recorded the mini-disk could be switched off though, in fact, none made this request.

3.6 Method of analyses

3.6.1 Quantitative

The questionnaires were analysed using the statistical package, SPSS.

The question items, 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' were analysed in both their uncollapsed form, and when collapsed to 'agree' and 'disagree'. The results are presented in their collapsed form as this provided a more coherent picture of the findings.

A factor analysis was carried out using a Varimax and Rotated Solution. Pearson's Chi Square was also used to analyse whether there was a significant association between the background factors, *country of residence, nationality, ethnicity, gender* and *socio-economic status*, and pupils' patterns of responding. In all instances the significance level was set at $p<0.05$.

It should be noted in considering the results that percentages may not total 100% as a result of rounding errors.

3.6.2 Qualitative

Whichever method was to be adopted in this study, it was more important that the method served the research rather than vice versa. It had to make sense within the confines of the topic and within the research design itself. Whilst the data collection was driven by theory in the sense that the topic of 'decision-making', 'upper secondary education' and 'pupils' perspectives' in a 'comparative context' had been chosen, and a preliminary literature search carried out before any data was collected, the findings of the pilot studies bore heavily upon the themes which were used to guide later data collection. Thus, in attempting to capture the meaning attached to the data by the participants, a form of grounded theory was used in the sense that, ultimately, the final 'subtle' categories, for example, categories of decision-making or the issues of support and assessment, emerged from the data. More 'general' themes, such as context, however, were implicitly to be found in the data as a result of the research topic though the nuances of the concepts in the particular setting of this research were not understood. Since it does not strictly adhere to the work of Glaser, Strauss and Corbin (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) I refer to it as a 'form' of grounded theory. As Bryman and Burgess (1994) note, grounded theory, in reality, is more about a general disposition towards the data rather than an approach which is adopted in its entirety.

A further consideration in this study was the way in which different types of data were utilised. The data arose from a number of sources - questionnaires, interviews, national policies, prospectuses, 'casual' observations, and historical information about the two countries. Thus, one

was presented with essentially qualitative data although some quantitative analysis was necessary with Phase I, a method advocated for comparative research by Osborn et al (2003). Mason discusses the possibility of mixing qualitative and quantitative data in one study. She writes, "....I think the most important challenge in integrating quantitative and qualitative data analysis involves developing mechanisms to ensure that you are asking sensible, meaningful and appropriately limited questions of your data sets" (1994:108). Even in trying to integrate the findings, it is important to recognise that the data is unlikely to be able to answer the same questions. Her advice is to integrate the data at the level of topics rather than themes.

In this study the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data are presented separately (Chapters Five and Six). In each chapter attention is drawn to the specific research questions to which the data contributes. The reasons for making this distinction in the presentation of the results, as opposed to presenting the findings thematically, were twofold. Firstly the purpose of the questionnaires and their timing within the study were different to the interviews, and secondly, although the results from both types of data support each other, it seemed problematic to cross between quantitative and qualitative results in a way which would accurately reflect the findings. Following Mason's recommendation, specific topics are later discussed (Chapter Seven) in which findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses can be related.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has sought to outline and justify the choices made in creating and implementing the study. It has also been important to document the process of collecting the data and the range of restrictions encountered, particularly given that it is a comparative study. All such factors can influence the final results.

In summary, the study is essentially qualitative in nature through the use of semi-structured interviews. However, it is also supported through the use of questionnaires as a selection process for the interviews and, therefore, involves some quantitative data.

Ten institutions from two cities in England and Norway were approached. Within these, a number of pupils in the final year of their upper secondary education were asked to complete the questionnaire, and from this a smaller number of pupils were selected and interviewed. The focus of the interviews was upon the pupils' evaluation of their experiences of decision-making as they moved into and through upper secondary education. Most of these pupils were later contacted and questioned about their experiences following upper secondary school. A number of school representatives and guidance counsellors were also interviewed.

The following chapters focus upon the results of the study. Chapter Four is concerned not with specific findings from the data collection but more the background information concerning each country. The findings from the questionnaires and interviews are presented in Chapters Five and Six.

Chapter Four- Culture and Context

Having established the theoretical and methodological bases of this thesis in the previous chapters, the purpose of Chapter Four is twofold; firstly, to contextualise the study, and secondly, as a source of data for interpreting and understanding the two countries.

What follows is a summary of the findings and a brief introduction to England and Norway as countries of comparison (section 4.1), followed by a discussion of the historical, economic and political features of the two countries (4.2), their curriculum traditions (4.3), an outline of their educational systems (4.4), a discussion of national policy relating to upper secondary education (4.5), and information concerning careers education and guidance (4.6). The chapter is concluded with a summary of the findings (4.7). This chapter is also supported by a section concerned with details of each of the schools in which the study was conducted, including observations made during visits (see School Contexts, Appendix 9).

4.1 Introduction

This chapter contributes towards answering research questions 1 and 4.

1. What are the stated aims and purposes of policy in upper secondary education in England and Norway and how are these achieved?

4. To what extent are *national educational policy*, its *implementation* and *pupils' perspectives* socio-cultural constructs, and what might be learnt from contextualising upper secondary education?

Findings

Broadly speaking, the aims and purposes of policy in England and Norway differ in a very fundamental way. In England there is a concern with providing individual freedom, the possibility to make choices, and establish a curriculum suitable to the specific needs of that person. This has become very much intertwined with the rhetoric surrounding human capital theory and economic goals associated with education. In Norway, there is a far greater emphasis upon equality of access, providing a broad curriculum, and in general, focusing upon the collective rather than the individual. The society functions as a single unit but, in so doing, it recognises the equality of all its citizens. Consequently, Norwegian policy and its implementation have tended to shun away from the marketisation of education.

In England, opportunities are provided through attainment at specific levels within the system, and with a broad range of possible choices of qualification, subjects, and to some extent, institutions. In Norway, there are no specific entry requirements in order to continue through the system but pupils are expected to demonstrate a sound understanding across all subject areas in order to be able to compete for the better schools and courses. The system is straightforward and coherent although the freedom to specialise is somewhat limited.

Whether policy and its implementation are socio-cultural constructs is, perhaps, best informed by consideration of the curriculum traditions of the two countries. England's humanist-essentialist traditions compared with Norway's adherence to a rationalist-encyclopaedic approach are both clearly evident within the descriptions given above. What may be learnt from contextualising upper secondary education is that educational policy and the educational system itself are simply expressions of a particular culture. They represent the many hundreds of years upon which they are founded, and any common experiences in recent times must be measured against the long-standing cultural development.

4.1.1 Locating England and Norway

It would seem that England and Norway have a great deal in common in terms of external pressures. Considering a world map, they are both located in north western Europe, they are both advanced industrial countries, both have pursued a Keynesian approach in creating a welfare state, they have both experienced the same periods of boom and recession throughout the 20th century, both have experienced the impact of global competition and the need for neo-liberal economic policies, and both have some common ties through international trade and membership of organisations such as the World Bank and the United Nations. Furthermore, like most advanced capitalist countries, both countries are pursuing a high-skill, knowledge-driven, economic and learning society (Payne, 2002a). In spite of such commonalities, England and Norway represent very different internal national processes and, in many ways, may be considered to be in direct opposition. For example, England is renowned for its long history as a dominant and imperialist power, whereas Norway has a relatively short history as an independent state, having spent centuries under the rule of Denmark, and later Sweden. Whilst Norway is sparsely populated with rural-based traditions, England is very densely populated and has largely developed its urban areas. Norway has never operated under a feudal system and, to this day, prides itself on its egalitarian approach, whereas England is reputed for its aristocratic elite, the influence of which may still be seen in its present day customs. Finally, Norway has a strong sense of national pride whilst some suggest that England is currently undergoing a crisis in its national identity (Richards, 1997).

These factors, and others described below, aim to encapsulate each country in a way which may assist in the understanding of the policies and practices implemented by each country as described

through the experiences of the pupils. As stated earlier (Broadfoot, 2000a), a comparative study is in danger of reaching erroneous conclusions if data is interpreted independently of its cultural context. Similar concerns have been raised by Planel (2000) and Osborn (2004).

4.2 Background

4.2.1 England

England, the parliamentary capital of a group of countries and provinces known as 'the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland' (UK), is situated off the north west coast of the European continent with France some 35 kilometres from its East coast, and Norway, approximately 500 kilometres from its most northern regions (see map, pg 31). England, in particular, is densely populated. The total population in the UK is approximately 58 million, of which approximately 49 million are inhabitants of England in a land mass of just 146,694 square kilometres. England may be noted for its diversity of terrain with a mixture of rural and urban areas, varying from small villages situated in remote locations to large cities, although it is fair to say that few areas are unpopulated. London, the capital city, with 8 million residents represents one of the most densely populated cities throughout the world. The diversity of location reflects the mixed industry that England has experienced over the centuries, moving from agriculture, to various manufacturing industries such as coal and iron, to chemicals and electricity, and more recently financial services and information technology. England's long and colourful history provides it with a heritage which underpins the English identity. It is this history, including the monarchy, which is a further source of income through tourism.

In recent times, a landmark in British history is, perhaps, what became known as the 'Thatcher Revolution'. In 1979 the Conservative Party was voted into power and went on to remain in government for four terms until 1997, mainly under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher. The 1970s had been a turning point in British and world economics, with the two OPEC oil crises of 1973 and 1979/80 ending a period in the 1950s and 60s in which many sloganised the phrase 'Britain had never had it so good'. Conservative policy seemed to provide the answer to the economic difficulties with the aim of making Britain competitive in an international market and by reducing the role of the state through privatization and direct competition for national services and amenities. In this way, companies would be forced to raise their standards and lower their prices as a means of gaining custom. By providing individuals with such choices, the power was with the people. In doing so, Britain became a nation of consumers rather than citizens.

This policy also reached into education – "Schools in England are now set within the whole paraphernalia of a market system" (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995:1). Schools were given greater control over their own finances and to determine the size of their budget by their success or failure

in attracting pupils. This was reinforced through financing per capita such that the more pupils a school could enrol the more monies the school would be awarded. Furthermore, pupils, employers, and in particular, parents were considered to be consumers with the right to choose where their child should study. This policy neglected many of the differences between parents which provided them with more or less advantageous positions in making those choices - the opportunity to move to the area of a popular school being an obvious example. At the same time teacher autonomy was reduced, standardised assessments introduced and a national curriculum implemented. In their comparative study with primary school teachers, McNess, Broadfoot and Osborn (2003) drew attention to the dramatic change in the role of teachers following the introduction of market forces into education in England. In their new role, teachers were required to attend frequent meetings and to become involved in the development of policies covering all aspects of schooling. Collegiality became a key factor with teachers required to become involved in 'planning curriculum topics, sharing resources and exchanging expertise'. Teachers became pressured to deliver an education based upon governmental demands and national economic goals, alongside extensive planning and assessment. McNess et al note, ".... (teachers have) increased feeling of priorities being imposed from outside which has led to some loss of personal fulfilment and autonomy" (2003:249). A view supported by the work of Webb and Vulliamy (1999).

Margaret Thatcher's notion of a direct relationship between the state and the individual appealed to the wave of thought amongst the British people at the time. Infamously, she is quoted as saying, 'Give the people what they want' - the notion of 'society' was undermined. Such reforms, however, paved the way for future global economic trends since they represent what has become known as the new world economic policy - *neo-liberalism*. By the late 1990s, however, the consequences of such policies had been experienced and were perceived as detrimental to society as a collective. Thus in 1997, having re-marketed themselves as 'New Labour' with a commitment to the community and individual freedom in the context of society, rather than the old style of socialism, the Labour Party were voted into government. Nevertheless, neo-liberal policies seem set to stay, and certainly it would be problematic to reverse many of the reforms set in motion by the Conservative party. "Competitive markets were the only way a modern economy could prosper.... Out of office for a generation, the Labour Party was prepared to swallow this medicine" (Glennerster, 2000:205). And yet their victory indicates that the general population were not satisfied with international economic competitiveness as the main focus of policy. Labour policy now focuses upon protecting the individual from the economy but cannot be described as a social democracy (Sevaldsen, Vadman & Mustad, 1999).

4.2.2 Norway

Norway (*Norge)*, a relatively large country in terms of land mass (387,000 km^2), lies in the north west of Europe (see map, pg 31). Its mountainous terrain, numerous fjords and waterfalls, and

extreme winters have had a great impact upon both the settlements of its inhabitants and the nature of its industry. With little more than four million people living in Norway, and with only 4% of the mainland being cultivated, towns and villages are largely scattered throughout the country. There are five major cities (Oslo, Stavanger, Tromsø, Bergen and Trondheim); Oslo being the capital with approximately 450,000 inhabitants. The rest of the country consists of small towns and villages with their own distinct dialects. Norwegian industry, unsurprisingly, is largely rural with farming and fishing being predominant. More recent trade has come through the development of hydropower in the 1950s and oil drilling since the 1970s making it one of the wealthiest countries in Europe. That Norway has some of the cleanest lakes, mountains and fjords, also makes it an important ecological site for research, and contributes greatly to the country's tourist industry, as well as being a key point in Norwegian national pride.

The inception of Norway as a country in its own right is very recent. From 1380-1814 it was under Danish rule and from 1814-1905 it was in union with Sweden. It was not until 1905, therefore, that Norway became an independent State with a brief interruption during WWII when it was occupied by Germany for five years. The long struggle to reach its current status has had a great influence upon Norwegian attitudes towards outside involvement. This has most recently been evident in the political crisis of the mid 1970s that resulted from discussions about joining the EU. A national referendum determined that Norway would not enter though in later years it became a member of the European Economic Area (EEA). It may also go some way to explaining why increased numbers of refugees and immigrants, and changes resulting from globalisation, seem to pose such a threat to Norwegian national identity.

Norway's historical status as a 'province' and its scattered population also meant that Norway did not pass through a period of feudalism. Most Norwegians were self-owning farmers, and thus there was no aristocracy - its present royal family is from Danish decent. As Hylland Eriksen notes, Norway remained untouched by continental renaissance and was essentially left to develop on its own. "The relative isolation of the society, which among other things entailed the absence of a powerful landed gentry, has had substantial effects on its ideology, social organisation and self-definition" (1993:31). Any class distinctions emerged through rural/urban divides following industrialisation. Even now, half of Norwegians live in rural areas. The geographical and historical factors described above are important in considering more recent developments in Norway. National identity is just one case in point. The simple things in life tend to be glorified, and an egalitarian approach is important. Norwegians adhere to the notion of 'egalitarian individuality', the view that all individuals are equally important.

Social democracy became a dominant political force in the mid 1930s when the Liberals and Conservatives failed to create a non-socialist alliance, but the labour movement and rural groups

merged to form the Labour Party (*Det Norske Arbeiderparti*, DNA), a party which has been in power for almost 70 years. The 1950s and 60s were a Golden Age for Norway as well as the rest of Europe. The 1970s OPEC oil shock, however, marked the end of the Golden Age and led to a world recession. Though Norway developed the largest current account deficit in the whole OECD area at 47% of the GDP (Mjøset, 1993), it did not pose a long term problem because it coincided with the first oil reserves being located off the Norwegian coastline. Nevertheless, the economic climate led to the Conservative Party being voted in and adopting neo-liberal policies, a brief period in which the markets were deregulated. Although the Labour Party was soon re-voted into power the difficulty for the government at this point was whether or not to undo the measures adopted by the Conservative Party. Eriksen notes, "Because the DNA (the Labour Party) had no alternative recipe for economic management, they, like many of their European sister parties, were forced into accepting market solutions" (1993:132) - although this is far from saying that the ideology of liberalism was adopted.

The extent of marketisation in education in Norway is limited even though neo-liberalism continues to be the main economic strategy. Very recently there has been some evidence of restructuring (Beach, Gorden & Lahelma, 2005); the media has begun to announce which schools have the best marks or grades but there are no official league tables. Plus, there are an increasing number of private schools, but these still form the minority and receive government funding. Many of these in higher education are concerned with providing vocational training. There is some decentralisation of power to schools with head teachers being responsible for the running of the school. There are, however, no policies in place which provide parents with increased choice, no initiatives in which industry plays a direct part in education, teachers remain fairly autonomous with some degree of accountability but still this is limited and although schools in Oslo do experience a degree of pressure to attract pupils since the recent introduction of funding per capita, they do not 'market' themselves in order to attract 'customers'. The Centre-Right government (2001-2005), a coalition of the Conservative party (*Høyre*), the Christian Democrats (*Kristelig Folkeparti*) and the Liberals (*Venstre*), introduced the concept of national standardised tests in order to give teachers feedback about their pupils' abilities in comparison with pupils in other schools but there was some controversy over this since this could, potentially, lead to competition between schools. The introduction of such tests has been delayed by the new coalition government headed by the Labour party (September 2005). Such conflicts within educational policy highlight the disparity between modern neo-liberalist reforms and the existing social democratic ideals within Norway but, nevertheless, change is on its way. Welle-Strand and Tjeldvoll (2002), quoting Slenning (1999), suggest that Norway has remained 'one generation behind' as a result of its adherence to equality but this is no longer possible. Rinne (2002), too, suggests that the level of support for equality of opportunity is no longer so strong in the Nordic countries and that marketisation is creeping into the educational setting.

It seems fair to say that Norway is in the process of transformation that occurred within England and other parts of the world during the last two decades. The late timing of this process must reflect the conflicting ideology of modern day economic policy and the ideology which Norway is founded upon. The values of egalitarianism embedded in the welfare state and regional policies remain, though with less conviction; Norwegian national identity continues to reflect its rural heritage, particularly with apparent outside threats resulting from international trade agreements and a media culture; cities such as Oslo, for example, are robust and lively urban areas and yet they are also valued for their close vicinity to the surrounding forests and lakes. As Hylland Eriksen suggests, Norway is "....wedged between the turbulence of modernity and the inertia of tradition" (1993:11).

4.3 Educational traditions

This section now considers the curriculum theories and traditions which have informed English and Norwegian education. Curriculum theories and traditions reflect past philosophies, the very ideas and beliefs that led to a particular system taking the form that it does now.

4.3.1 England

A curriculum tradition refers to a particular view of knowledge, what is valued by a given society, who the knowledge is for, and how it is best communicated (McLean, 1995). *Humanism* became a central view of knowledge in Europe - the purpose of education was to encourage moral behaviours among the elite such that they could develop their leadership skills and go on to become members of the government. This view was based upon the work of Plato (427-347 BC), and in England specifically, John Locke (1632-1704). It starts from the potential of the individual, and suggests that knowledge and skills, necessary for later life, are developed through studying the achievements of predecessors. In England, notably, the individual was considered to have innate abilities and thus students could start on a subject at whichever level suited them, learning was considered to be intuitive. "The outcome in England was specialism based on personal taste of students or teachers which polarized the subject matter of education....." (McLean, 1995:27).

Humanism, as a tradition, is closely related to the curriculum theory, *essentialism*. This too, was based upon the work of Plato some 2,000 years ago. In his famous text 'Republic', Plato claims that political leadership should be the remit of philosopher-kings only, supported by auxiliaries. A third tier, workers, should not lead in any way, but instead remain within a single occupation. This system was possible through a view of individual innate ability - "Men inherit qualities which fit them for assigned roles in society" (Holmes & McLean, 1989:9). Thus, whichever cleavage an individual is born into, his intellectual abilities will reflect that transmitted to him from his parents. Only those born into elite cleavages are capable of a humanist education which will prepare them

for later leadership of their country. This view may be seen in the English education system as late as 1979 when the Conservative party claimed that the new comprehensive schooling 'experiment' had failed by not giving the working classes an education that was appropriate to their needs.

Aristocratic traditions are also evident in English political culture which determines where control for teaching and learning lies. Contemporary debates, worldwide, focus upon where decision-making should be made and whether it should be founded by administrative, political or ideological rationales (McLean, 1995). The most common trends may be identified as collectivism and pluralism, that is, centralised planning versus a balance of power across several key organisations. England is essentially a *pluralist* state, recognising differences between individuals and different groups. *Pluralism,* however, may also be identified at three different levels - regional, private, and organisational. It is in England that the field of *privatist-individualist* political culture is most evident compared to other European countries. This emphasis arose through the influence of voluntary agencies and the Church upon schooling in the 19th century. A tradition of diversity developed through local initiatives with a belief in meeting the needs of individuals through differentiation of the curriculum. These views hold true in modern times, and in the broader society, it is regarded that individuals need freedom to improve themselves and central control can only be regarded as restrictive. This may be one reason why England was one of the first countries to implement decentralised policies in educational decision-making in the 1980s.

4.3.2 Norway

In Norway, the tendency has been to loosely follow the Danish model of education, the *folkeskole.* This was a *naturalist* approach to schooling in which the purpose of education was to focus on what was inside the individual rather than the outside world. In Denmark, Grundtvig (1783-1872) was the main proponent of the *folkeskole* - the notion that the local community should control schooling such that cultural heritage could be preserved. Schooling was not meant as a means of reinforcing and identifying a ruling class, but for educating a child to contribute to his local community - "Education for man in nature has no place for unnaturally removing him from his social and natural milieu in which his nature can fruitfully develop" (McLean, 1992:62).

The Danish *folkeskole* was not entirely adopted by Norway but most of the ideas surrounding it were taken into the system of national schooling (Berggreen, 1993). All compulsory schooling remains within the remit of the local community, and the value of local education may also be seen in the continued trend for morning-only schooling until pupils are aged 11 although there are current discussions about extending the school day. Whilst this reflects the importance of familial education in providing moral and cultural instruction, in practice most children will remain in school for leisure activities until mid afternoon.

Whilst *naturalism* is clearly an important curriculum tradition in elementary schooling, *rationalist-encyclopaedism,* as a curriculum theory, may be more evident in secondary schooling. *Rationalism* suggests that worthwhile knowledge is that which is external to the individual, specifically maths and the sciences, whereas *encyclopaedism* purports the view that education should include all human knowledge, and that its purpose is to provide all citizens with knowledge of their civic duties and responsibilities. This view is not necessarily incompatible with Norwegian views of *naturalism,* since it is a particularly egalitarian approach to education - all citizens are capable of intellectual thought. However, it is also based upon the notion that the schooling process will identify leaders and this form of social mobility is, perhaps, less compatible with *naturalism.*

The dominant political culture in Norway is *collectivism* (McLean, 1995). This has its origins in the view that the State (and educational system) can modernise society; teachers and schools are viewed as instruments of the State. The key feature, therefore, is central control. However, McLean suggests that, across Europe, there are individual variations. Within Norway, primary schooling has remained the remit of local councils and state control has, generally, been relaxed. Regional concerns and neo-liberal economic pressures towards decentralisation of decision-making also reduce the possibility for strong central control. Instead, the purpose of the State is to ensure a sense of coherence in a country where large distances between villages have created diversity that, without central co-ordination and strong communication networks, could otherwise become fragmented (Malinowski, 1993). As with other aspects of Norwegian culture, there appear to be tensions between the new and the old. Nevertheless, McLean (1995) suggests that, in spite of recent changes, the key issue with regards to *collectivist* states is the "monopolised state view of education" in the minds of stakeholders (pg 77).

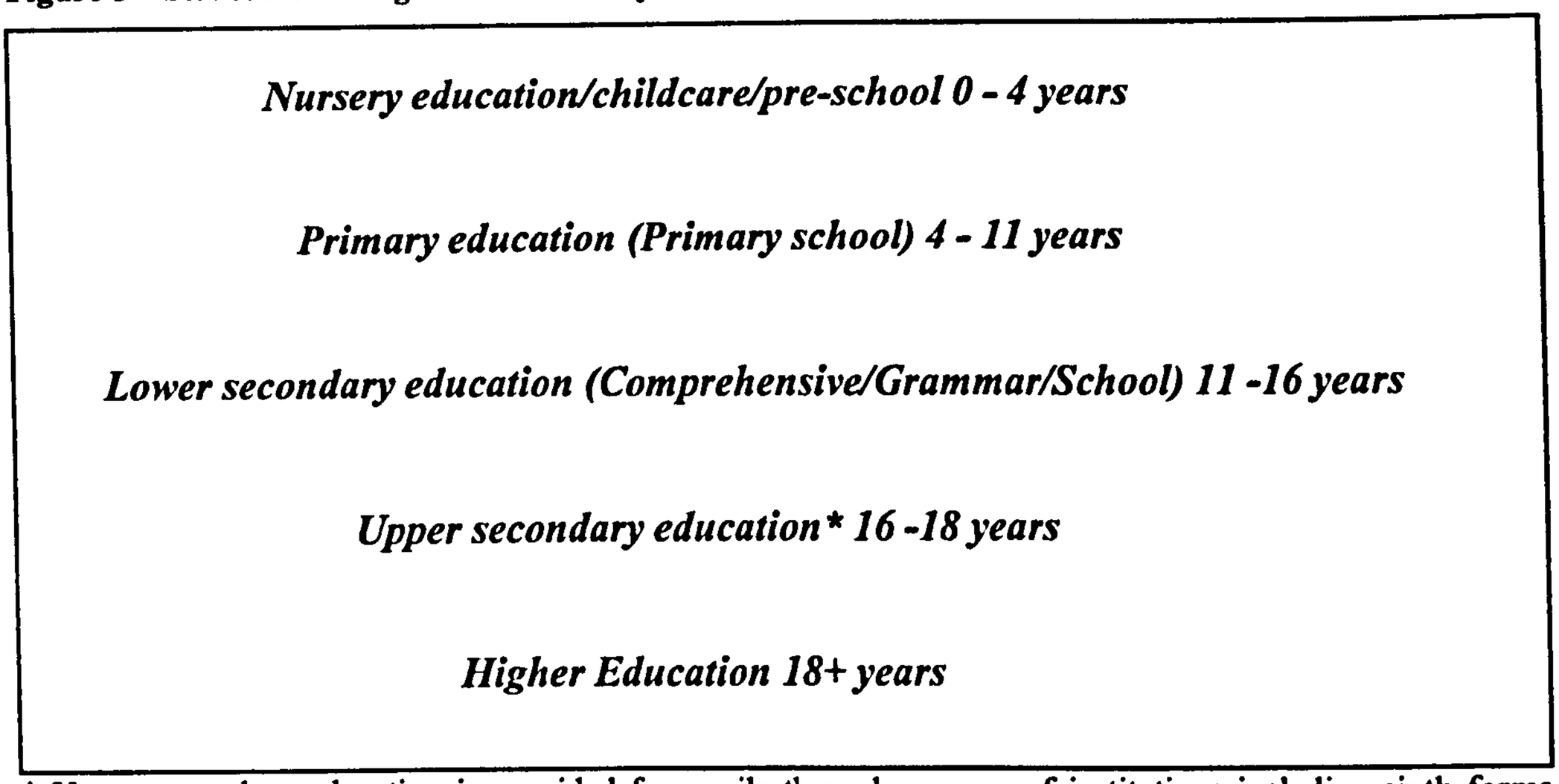
4.4 Structure of Educational Systems

4.4.1 England

4.4.1.1 Introduction

In England, compulsory formal education is a 12 year period, most often followed by 2 years of non-compulsory study. The academic year begins in September and runs through to the following July. Children will begin school in the academic year in which they are five years of age. Pre-school education has recently been introduced in the form of a Foundation Curriculum for three-four year olds. For the under threes, day care, generally private, is in the form of childminders, private nurseries and playgroups. The structure of the educational system can be represented as shown below (see figure 5).

Figure 5 Structure of English education system



* Upper secondary education is provided for pupils through a range of institutions including sixth forms within the comprehensive school, Colleges of Further Education, Grammar schools, and Sixth Form Colleges.

The government and parliament set out the aims of the English educational system. The Department for Skills and Education (DfES) is the administrative body responsible for educational matters. This department is supported by the work of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), both of which aim to ensure quality of education through working with examining bodies and through inspections of state institutions. The country comprises of local authorities (LAs) which are responsible for local implementation of national policy. The governing body of each school, comprising of interested parties from the school and local community, are responsible for overseeing financial and administrative aspects of the school organisation. Sixth Forms and Colleges of Further Education are funded by the Learning and Skills Council.

Teachers follow the National Curriculum (first implemented in 1991). This prescribes the curriculum content and standards pupils are expected to achieve. At the end of each Key Stage (ages 7, 11, 14 and 16) pupils are assessed. In Key Stages 1-3 they are tested in the core curriculum areas (English, Maths and Science). These Standardised Assessment Tasks (SATs) are marked internally and determine where a child is in relation to national averages. At the end of their lower secondary education (Key Stage 4) pupils sit GCSE exams in a range of subjects which are assessed externally.

4.4.1.2 Upper Secondary Schooling

The following sub-sections focus entirely upon upper secondary education in England – the general path of study, the relevant qualifications and methods of assessment.

Qualifications and Courses

The English model of post-compulsory education is based upon the level of study, and is thus, assessment-based. There are five levels of study by which all the possible qualifications are measured. This model also provides some coherence since, for historical reasons there are a number of options available which may appear confusing (see table 3 below).

Table 3 Structure of qualifications in England

Level	Examples of qualification		
	Academic	**Vocational**	**Occupationally-specific**
5	Post-graduate degree	Vocationally-related Post Graduate qualifications	Professional qualification Middle management
4	Degree	Vocationally related degrees/ Higher National Diploma	Higher Technician Junior management
3	2 AS/A2 level	12 unit AVCE Vocationally-related National Diploma	Technician. Advanced Craft. Supervisor
2	5 GCSEs	Broad Based Craftsmen Foundation	Basic Craft Certificate
1	National curriculum	Pre-vocational certificate	Semi-skilled

Source: Adapted from NVQ framework, Education and Training for the 21st century (DES, 1991:18).

Pupils may study any level in upper secondary education although the intention is that pupils will complete Level 3 courses. If they choose to continue their education at university they will be required to have successfully achieved a Level 3 standard in addition to the specific entrance requirements of that institution.

Entrance requirements for Level 3 upper secondary courses vary but since GCSEs (General Certificate in Secondary Education) are the exams which pupils typically complete at the end of their lower secondary education this is used as the benchmark. Pupils are generally required to have passed five of their GCSEs at grade C or above and, in many instances they will be expected

to have achieved a grade A or B in subjects they plan to study further. The application process is arranged by the school or college to which the pupil wishes to study and typically involves an interview in which the school and pupil discuss the strengths and ambitions of the pupil to ensure that the correct choice is made.

Pupils may study either academic or vocational subjects, or a mixture of both. They may choose to study a single course or several smaller courses to create their own programme. This largely depends upon what is on offer at the school to which they are applying. Academic courses have, until recently, been the remit of schools, and vocational courses the remit of Colleges of Further Education. Whilst it is possible for all institutions to provide both options, this bias remains.

Academic line

The traditional academic qualification available to English pupils is the 'A' level. This is a two year programme divided into AS and A2. Pupils are often encouraged to study four AS subjects in their first year and, depending upon their grades at the end of the first year and preferences for the subjects, to continue with only three subjects at A2 level. This is a matter of choice and pupils may choose to continue with all four subjects or to continue with three and select a new AS subject. Two years of study per subject must be completed, however, to gain each full 'A' level qualification. Although two 'A' levels are regarded as an indication of Level 3 standard, it is generally expected that pupils applying to university will be required to have three subjects with specific grades. Grading at 'A' level is from A through to E with U or 'unclassified' as a fail. Pupils with an outstanding performance can be awarded A*. Those who anticipate they will achieve a high standard, generally estimated to be 10% of A level candidates, may choose to study an AEA or Advanced Extension Award in addition.

There is an extensive range of subjects available for study at 'A' level and what is available depends very much upon the school and the examining body through which the pupils are examined. It is the school's choice which examining body is used as a means of providing their pupils with increased choice. There are five such bodies in the UK but in England one of three are used - the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA), Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR), or EDEXCEL (a merger of the Business and Technology Education Council and the University of London Examinations and Assessment Council, BTEC and ULEAC).

In addition to their 'A' levels pupils are also required to study *Key Skills*, a core module which covers basic number, communication and information technology. Some schools also require their pupils to take an additional 'A' level in General Studies which covers issues such as law, media, gender, equal opportunities and economic awareness.

Vocational line

The options for vocational pupils are somewhat complex. Pupils may choose to study (i) in school/college, (ii) within the workplace with the school/college working as a moderator of their work, or through (iii) an apprenticeship programme which combines both. Each of these possibilities is discussed below:-

(i) School/College

The nature of the course largely determines whether it is possible for a pupil to remain school-based for their course. For example, it may be more feasible for a course in secretarial work compared to a course in carpentry. Many colleges also have facilities which allow them to offer courses that would otherwise be required through apprenticeship, for example, beauty studios. The range of vocational options is extensive with pupils able to choose between BTEC diplomas, OCR Nationals, CACHE diplomas, City of Guilds, the Association of Accounting Technicians, the Institute of Legal Executives, EASA Part 66 and others, depending upon the type of course being studied.

The qualifications/courses listed above are largely to be found in Colleges of Further Education with the BTEC and OCR National diplomas predominating. These cover subject areas such as Business, Sport, Travel and Tourism, and Public Services. They are work-related and focus upon a single sector of employment. In many cases, the courses have been designed through collaboration with industry. The focus is largely upon combining both theory and practice. Some of the more recently introduced 'Vocational A levels' or AVCE (Advanced Certificate in Vocational Education) may be taught in schools. These are similar to the BTEC and OCR Nationals but lack the direct involvement with the work-place. Instead, they are geared to making higher education more accessible to pupils who wish to study a vocational course. Subjects are available in the following areas:- Art and Design, Business, Construction and the Built Environment, Electrical/Electronic Engineering, Engineering, Health and Social Care, Hospitality and Catering, Information and Communication Technology, and Science. They can be covered as a three, six or 12 unit course, the six unit course being the equivalent of one traditional 'A' level and the 12 unit course the equivalent of two 'A' levels. Pupils may choose to study a combination of AVCEs with 'A' levels. The BTEC and OCR Nationals, at the appropriate level, are also equivalent to two 'A' levels.

(ii) Workplace-based with School/College moderation

The National Vocational Qualification, more commonly known as NVQs, is a method of assessment aimed at recognising standards of performance within the workplace. It is a means of encouraging life-long learning and continued achievement for those in employment and was designed by industry and commerce. There are five levels of assessment with Level 3 being

equivalent to two 'A' levels and Level 5 recognised as professional qualifications. NVQs differ from AVCEs in that they are directly related to a specific job rather than an occupational field.

(iii) Apprenticeship programmes

Under this scheme, introduced in 1996, students are in employment and develop specific skills in relation to their work, but at the same time have connections with the college. An assessor will help the student to structure the knowledge they gain through their employment as well as advise them on the portfolio they will produce for assessment.

There are two levels of Modern Apprenticeship - one aimed at pupils aged 16 - 18 years, and the other aimed at 19 - 24 year olds. The first, a Foundation Modern Apprenticeship is a one year programme and results in a Level 2 qualification. Those undertaking the Advanced Modern Apprenticeship are enrolled for up to two years and will gain a Level 3 qualification. Both programmes involve Key Skills and a technical qualification such as a BTEC diploma at the appropriate level.

Assessment

For those exams pertaining to upper secondary, the mode of assessment depends largely upon the qualification a pupil has chosen to study.

- 'A' level assessment is a combination of examinations and coursework depending upon the particular subject although a substantial amount remains external. Exams are set by one of the three examining bodies (AQA, OCR or EDEXCEL) and arranged on a national basis. Approximately 20% of each 'A' level includes *synoptic* assessment, that is, the ability to make connections between different aspects of the subject.

- AVCEs involve a combination of both internally (two thirds) and externally (one third) assessed units through portfolio evidence and examinations. Internally assessed work is moderated by the awarding body. Approximately half of the units taken are compulsory and half optional depending upon the subject. The total score of all 12 units is converted into a grade from A to E in line with the 'A' level system. BTEC diplomas (EDEXCEL) and OCR Nationals (OCR) follow a similar structure with a range of assignments, case studies, practical activities, and a portfolio providing evidence of achievement. The key difference is the practical element of the qualification and the location of the learning environment.

- NVQs focus upon practical understanding or competence. Individuals produce a portfolio of work which they complete based upon their daily working environment. Assessment is based upon specific tasks which fall within the requirements of a specific job.

4.4.2 Norway

4.4.2.1 Introduction

Formal education in Norway involves 10 years of compulsory education and 3 years of non-compulsory. The academic year runs from August to June and children ordinarily begin primary school (*barneskole*) in the year in which they turn six. Prior to this most children attend nursery education (*barnehage*). Following seven years in primary school, pupils will move on to lower secondary (*ungdomsskole*) for three years. In some areas the primary and lower secondary school will be combined (*grunnskole*). Pupils who choose to continue their education in upper secondary (*videregående skole*) are entitled to three years academic education or four years vocational education and training. The structure of the education system, therefore, is as follows:-

Figure 6 Structure of Norwegian education system

Nursery education (barnehage) 0-6 years

Primary education (barneskole) 6 - 13 years

Lower secondary education (ungdomsskole) 13 -16 years

Upper secondary education (videregående skole) 16 -19 years

Tertiary education 19+ years

Note: In addition, pupils may study at *Folkhøgskole* from the age of 16 years.

The government and the parliament (*Stortinget*) establish the objectives and framework for the Norwegian educational system. The Ministry of Education and Research or *Utdannings og Forskningsdepartementet* (UFD), previously known as *Kirke og undervisningsdepartementet* (*KUF*), is the highest public administrative body for educational matters and is responsible for implementing national policy. A common standard is maintained through legislation and a core curriculum (L97) which has recently been superseded by *Reform Kunnskapsløftet* (The Promotion of Knowledge Reform, August 2006). The education system is implemented nationally by the Directorate of Education (*Utdanningsdirektorat*). There are 19 counties throughout Norway, each of which has an educational department (*Skoleetaten*) which, amongst other things, co-ordinates local implementation of national policy. They are directly responsible for upper secondary education whereas the local councils (*kommune*) are responsible for primary and secondary

education. The government is responsible for higher education. Standards in education are maintained through a combination of internally and externally set exams. Pupils must sit a selection of external examinations at the end of lower and upper secondary education which are marked by two examiners (*sensorer*). The outcome of the examinations, when compared with the grades given internally provides teachers with feedback about their marking. The examiners follow national guidelines for written exams but local guidelines are applied for oral examinations.

4.4.2.2 Upper Secondary Schooling

As with the English section, upper secondary education in Norway is described in terms of the general path of study, the relevant qualifications and methods of assessment.

Qualifications and Courses

There are two main diplomas which pupils may achieve at the end of their upper secondary education – (a) the *certificate of upper secondary education* or (b) the *craft/journeyman's certificate* or other occupational qualification (official English translations, KUF). Which diploma a pupil receives depends upon whether they have chosen to study academic or vocational courses. In order to study at university, or in some other form of higher education institution, pupils must gain the academic diploma. In order to gain vocational competence pupils must gain the vocational diploma. The vocational certificate is usually the basis for obtaining middle ranking positions in business or may be the basis for further study such as a master certificate.

Pupils have a right to be admitted to one of three foundation courses of their choosing as long as they achieve an average of Grade 2 or higher in their lower secondary grades. Applications are made in the final year of lower secondary and are sent to a central office which allocates pupils to a school and course of study according to who has the highest grades and the number of places available within each school. The lowest entrance grade from the previous year is published annually and this may act as a guide to students who are applying the following year. The following three sections describe the possible education which pupils might opt for:-

Academic line

Over the three years all pupils must study an average of 30 hours per week. All pupils will follow a foundational course (*grunnkurs*) in their first year. For those selecting the academic route there is a single course in the first year, General and Business Studies. This course includes Norwegian, English, maths, natural sciences, and social studies. In the second and third years this splits into the General Studies and the Business Studies lines. Pupils will continue to study a range of obligatory core subjects (approximately 50% of the curriculum) but, in addition, they will choose a number of specialist subjects (*studieretning*). Pupils may select up to five subjects to be studied over the two

year period. Three subjects will be followed in their second year, one of which must be pursued in their third and final year. If they choose to study two or all three of their second year options in their third year instead of taking new courses they will gain two bonus points per course, that is, a maximum of four points. In addition, pupils studying mathematics, physics, chemistry or biology will receive an extra half point per subject per year of study, totalling a possible three points. Thus, pupils may attain a maximum of seven bonus points which are added to their final and overall diploma grade. Pupils may also include in their study programme elective subjects which are often not of an academic nature and may offer pupils a less intense workload. Such options might include choir, home page design, cookery, revue, travel, physical education, or psychology.

Vocational line

Pupils who wish to pursue a career in a particular trade have a choice of 11 foundational courses available in their first year. Schools typically offer two or three of these courses. The range of subjects available, are as follows:- Health and Social Care, Arts, Craft and Design, Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry, Hotel and Food-Processing Trades, Building and Construction Trades, Technical Building Trades, Electrical Trades, Engineering and Mechanical Trades, Chemical and Processing Trades, and Woodworking Trades. The foundational courses differ little in their content with all containing academic subjects and a general occupational course. Their *valgfag* (choice subject) will be the only specialisation in the first year, thereby allowing pupils to change course in their second year if they choose to. It is at this point that specialisation begins when there are over 100 course options available.

Pupils are intended to complete their training in the workplace through a two year apprenticeship. Each year, more than 31,000 pupils will become apprentices (KUF, 2001). However, this is not always possible and, in such cases, it is the responsibility of the school system to provide an additional third year of study which will enable pupils to gain their vocational qualification.

Academic and Vocational line

Some pupils pursuing vocational training may also wish to have access to higher education and, thus, the following two options represent a means of integrating academic subjects within the vocational training. In both instances, the pupils must follow a set number of sessions in Norwegian, English, maths, natural sciences, social studies, and recent history.

1. *Studying courses which are a mix of academic and vocational.* These are available in the following subject areas and lead to the academic certificate of upper secondary education rather than the vocational: -

Music, Dance and Drama
Sports and Physical Education
Media and Communication

2. *Choosing a special Advanced Course II with general subjects after two years of vocational training.* This is known as General Subjects Supplement (*påbygging*). At present it is available to pupils who have chosen to study:-

Management of Natural Resources (Advanced Course II)
Drawing, Design and Colour (Advanced Course II)

Adults who have already completed their upper secondary vocational training but wish to return to school may take an additional education, identical to the General Subjects Supplement (*påbygging*).

Overview

Having outlined the various options available to Norwegian pupils the following diagram provides an overview of the system.

Table 4 Structure of course options in Norway

	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th Year
Academic	Foundation course	Advanced Course I	Advanced Course II	
Vocational Option 1	Foundation course	Advanced Course I	Advanced Course II*	
Vocational Option 2	Foundation course	Advanced Course I	Training	
Vocational Option 3	Foundation course	Advanced Course I	Training and productive work	Training and productive work

Source: Adapted from Reform '94 (1994a:5).

* Advanced Course II is typically for students pursuing academic courses only. It may, however, include vocational pupils who have been unable to find a work placement or for those who are pursuing one of the options which permits integration of academic and vocational subjects.

Assessment

The grading system in upper secondary school runs from 6-0 with 6 being the highest. In order to qualify for either the academic or vocational diploma all modules (compulsory and optional) throughout the three years must be passed at grade 2 or above, the average of which (*gjennomsnitt*), plus any bonus points achieved through subject selection, determines the overall grade. Successful completion of all tests and exams leads to the upper secondary diploma (*Vitnemål. Videregående*

opplæring) whereas failure to do so leads to a documented partial competence (*kompetansebevis*). Pupils may re-sit failed exams in order to receive the diploma at one of the private upper secondary schools in the area. Pupils who achieve the diploma the first time are given priority when applying for places in higher education. They may also choose to re-sit exams alongside those who have failed in order to attain higher grades for the purpose of entry into higher education.

Pupils are also graded on their level of absence (*fravær*) and their 'orderliness' (*orden*), for example, whether homeworks have been completed or how punctual the pupils are in attending their classes. This information is provided on the diploma alongside the pupils' grades.

Virtually all examinations within the Norwegian system, formative and summative, are moderated by the school itself, utilising both the national curriculum and the feedback provided by a selection of external examinations. All pupils are required to sit three externally moderated Norwegian exams (two written and one oral) arranged by the Directorate of Education (*Utdanningsdirektoratet*). Furthermore, pupils on the academic line will be selected to sit an exam in one of their study programme options. The choice of subject is selected randomly by the school. Those on the vocational line sit exams arranged by the county (*fylke*) which is moderated by advisors from County Vocational Training Committee (*Yrkesopplæringsnemd*). There should be at least one board per occupation per county although, in practice, some counties share joint boards. All internal and external grades (over 30 in total) are all provided on the pupil's upper secondary diploma (*Vitnemål. Videregående opplæring*) (see Appendix 10). The final overall grade is the average of the total and it is this single grade which universities, colleges, and employers will use to judge individual aptitude.

Russetid

During the final year of upper secondary schooling, academic pupils (but not vocational) participate in a period of celebration known as *russetid* or 'school leaver's celebration time'. A committee of pupils is elected in each school to arrange various events throughout the year, mainly focusing upon the annual show or *revue,* the production of a school newspaper (*russeavis*) and the organisation of elaborate and exclusive parties. Pupils often contribute large sums of money towards such celebrations though this is not mandatory and is dependent upon how the celebrations are organised within a given school. Pupils often buy a coach to transport themselves to the parties and typically personalise it by painting it and fitting it with music equipment. Furthermore, the pupils wear overalls, either red (for general studies pupils) or blue (for business studies pupils) to distinguish themselves as *russ* and each pupil will have their own business card printed (*russekort*) which are handed out to young children in the area who compete for the most number of cards to be collected.

The celebrations intensify throughout the year culminating in events around Norway's national day on May 17th (*17 mai*). Pupils begin celebrating the night before on the 16th and then, typically, in the early hours of the 17th will drive through their local area utilising high-powered amplifiers to wake their teachers. The national day is also marked by the children's parade (*barnetoget*) in which children from the primary schools and school brass bands march throughout the town or city. In Oslo, this involves marching passed *Kong* Harald and *Dronning* Sonia, the king and queen of Norway, who stand on the balcony of the castle (*slottet*) to watch; the *russ* are the final part of this parade. A novel tradition of interest involves pupils from Kristelig Gymnasium, the upper secondary school which the youth of the royal family attends. Instead of marching passed the castle, pupils from this school crawl passed on their hands and knees in recognition of their royal connection.

4.5 Educational Policy

4.5.1 England

4.5.1.1 Upper secondary education - historically

Education for the masses has been a recurrent issue in England. In 1870, for example, elementary schooling was extended to include the working classes as well as the middle classes. By 1907, and with the introduction of the Free Places Regulations, up to 25% of the elementary intake could progress on to secondary education. From 1921, the school leaving age was raised to 14, and LEAs were obliged to provide some advanced courses. This may be considered the first indication of upper secondary education, or at least, 'post-compulsory'. Such courses tended to be technical in nature.

It was not until 1938 and the Spens Report that recommendations were made for *all* children to enter secondary education. Instead of introducing a single and common school for all, the existing secondary schools (grammar schools) remained for more able children, whilst post-elementary or secondary modern schools were created for less able pupils. A third strand, technical schools, based upon the LEA advanced courses, was also developed. Such a system was rationalised with the Norwood Report's (1943) description of three types of child's mind in 1943, and in 1944 the 'tripartite system' as it came to be know, was made law. Whatever the implications for pupil opportunity and equality of access in hindsight, what this new ruling meant was that all pupils, in theory, had the possibility to pursue an upper secondary education. Educational opportunities were based upon merit rather than social background (Bailey, 1997). In practice, it was only the grammar schools which provided post-16 education, and since only 25% of pupils passed the 11+ exam which gave entry to grammar schools, a large number of the population were prevented from further study. The 11+ was a particularly contentious exam since it apparently became a device for

sifting out the working classes from the middle classes, and thereby reinforcing the system of selection that had paved the way for earlier schooling in England. In 1951 this system was replaced with 'O' and 'A' levels for pupils aged 16 and 18 years respectively. The CSE (Certificate of Secondary Education) was later introduced in 1965 to mark the achievements of less able pupils.

In 1972 the school leaving age was raised to 16, and with developments such as the Business Education Councils and Manpower Service Commission (later to be merged into the Business and Technician Education Council or BTEC and which is now the examining board EDEXCEL), more and more young people were given the opportunity to follow courses suitable to their needs in post-compulsory education. Schools began to investigate courses that they might be able to offer alongside 'A' level study, and in the Colleges of Further Education foundational courses were devised by City and Guilds and the Royal Society of Arts. Later opportunities in schools and colleges included the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education and the Youth Training Scheme in the late 1980s. At this time, educational reform was fervent within the education system with, perhaps most notably, the introduction of GCSEs as a replacement to 'O' levels and CSEs in 1986, and the introduction of the National Curriculum, both of which were key features in the 1988 Education Bill. These reforms had an important part to play in increased participation in post-16 education (Brooks, 1998); the introduction of GCSEs and vocational qualifications as alternatives to A levels, and an emphasis on making the curriculum more relevant to working life, changed attitudes and motivation to staying on.

4.5.1.2 Upper secondary education - today

The outline above provides the historical context for present day upper secondary schooling. The important issue to note is that post-compulsory schooling became a particular focal point when the government made the link between a good and thorough education for *all* young people as a means of sustaining the economy. This influence remains strong in current day policy. In 1998, for example, in *'The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain'* the then education secretary, David Blunkett, outlined the approach of the newly appointed government. The opening paragraph read,

> We are in a new age – the age of information and of global competition. Familiar certainties and old ways of doing things are disappearing. The type of jobs we do have changed as have the industries in which we work and the skills they need. At the same time, new opportunities are opening up as we see the potential of new technologies to change our lives for the better. We have no choice but to prepare for this new age in which the key to success will be the continuous education and development of the human mind and imagination. (DfEE, 1998:9).

Evidently, post-16 and higher education were intrinsic elements within this strategy.

The focus upon raising standards and encouraging pupils to make choices which will benefit the nation in terms of its future economic competitiveness has increasingly influenced the educational policy which governs upper secondary education. This dramatic shift in policy was, perhaps, first marked by a report produced by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), '*Towards a skills revolution*', in 1989. It noted "Employers believe there must be a quantum leap in the education and training of young people to meet the needs of the British economy and to face the competition on even terms, while continuing the effort to improve the skills and competences of the existing workforce" (CBI, 1989:17). The CBI proposed a set of 'World Class Targets' for education and training which were officially launched in 1991 as 'National Targets for Education and Training'. These targets were central to the Government's education and training strategy set out in the White Paper '*Forging Ahead*' (DfEE, 1995).

The Government's aim was that the UK's competitiveness internationally could be increased by (i) raising attainment levels nationally, (ii) by ensuring that employers invested more thoroughly in their employees continued development, (iii) that all individuals had access to educational opportunities, and (iv) that all forms of education and training would develop skills within individuals such as self-reliance, flexibility, breadth of skills and general competence in core skills. Thus a central focus of the national targets was in ensuring that a greater percentage of the population achieved a Level 3 qualification, and therefore, the possibility of later studying in higher education. In 1985, 56% of 16-19 year olds were in education or training with 14% in higher education. By 1995 these figures had been raised to 75% and 31% respectively. With the majority of young people remaining within education post-16 it was crucial to help them make the best choices relevant to the needs of the labour market but at the same time satisfying personal needs. This meant that they must develop skills which would be in demand in the future and that they must establish patterns of learning which would allow them to retrain and flexibly move through the working environment as it changed. A key feature of this change in focus was also in creating a greater range of options within vocational education.

In May 1997, the UK public voted in a new Labour government which responded to calls for change, whilst also continuing the work of the previous government. In particular, it pursued the recommendations made by Sir Ron Dearing (*Review of Qualifications for 16-19 year olds*, 1996). Amongst the many suggestions made, the overriding message was that the qualifications within the upper secondary phase of education needed to be overhauled to create a coherent framework. As it stood, there was a clear distinction between academic and vocational subjects with different examining boards, different qualifications and different standards. Dearing's proposals included the following points:-

- Pupils should be encouraged to study a range of AS subjects in order to introduce breadth into their curriculum.
- Pupils should have the possibility of mixing academic and vocational subjects.
- Basic 'key skills' should be taught to raise standards in areas of learning key to most aspects of life.

All of these points were addressed within the *Qualifying for Success* reforms which were introduced as *Curriculum 2000* in September that year.

In 2001 the government published the white paper, '*Schools - Achieving Success*' (DfES, 2001) which was later to become the 2002 Education Act (DfES, 2002). In relation to upper secondary education the paper aimed to begin a debate concerning the best way of creating a coherent system of education for 14-19 year olds. In particular, the government hoped to develop the curriculum such that individuals may create combinations of qualifications and courses to meet their specific needs and aspirations and to achieve parity of esteem between academic and vocational subjects. In 2002 the green paper '*14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards*' was published. This paper addressed all the government's key concerns; economic competitiveness and social justice could be addressed by encouraging young people to develop their individual talents and thereby also meeting their full potential. This would mean that pupils would need more choice at a curriculum level both in terms of the types of courses available and the possible combinations they might create to meet their own personal circumstances. It would also mean more freedom in the timing of assessment with the possibility for those with special education needs taking examinations after a longer period of time, and with the more able pupils studying to higher levels than typically expected for their age group or sitting the Advanced Extension Award (AEA) introduced as part of *Curriculum 2000*. Estelle Morris, the then education minister, wrote, "The choices we are offering must not determine a young person's future irrevocably at 14, but should be flexible enough to allow young people to choose from both academic and vocational routes and switch between options as new interests and aptitudes become apparent" (DfES, 2002a:2).

To encourage pupils to stay on in upper secondary education and to recognise a whole range of achievements beyond the examination, the government proposed a Matriculation Diploma, a new award based around existing qualifications. The 14-19 educational phase would be marked at three points with a planning phase at the beginning when goals for the future would be established, GCSEs at aged 16 would be a midpoint, and the upper secondary stage would represent the final part of the period. "The more we treat the 14-19 period as a single phase, the greater the scope for students to move at a pace best suited to their abilities and preferred ways of learning" (DfES, 2002a:20). This new award would also overcome any biases associated with the status of the 'A'

level and vocational qualifications and at the same time provide pupils with the opportunity to have increased breadth in their curriculum.

An additional aspect of the reform related to guidance and the need for reliable and impartial information. "Between 14 and 19, young people are striving to develop their personal and social identities: they are assertive yet lacking self-confidence and vulnerable in their inexperience. They need and deserve good quality education and training. They also need support and guidance to help them to take best advantage of the opportunities available" (DfES, 2002b:2).

The working group which was formed in Spring 2003 to report on the *14-19 Curriculum and Qualification Reforms* suggested that (a) a common format should be established for all 14-19 learning programmes, and (b) a unified framework of diplomas should be implanted. This report, published in October 2004, became known as 'The Tomlinson Report' (DfES, 2004e). In February 2005, the DfES responded to this report with the White Paper, '*14-19 Education and Skills*' (DfES, 2005a). The four pillars of this paper were as follows:-

- vocational opportunities with clear routes to higher education and employment
- renewed focus on basic education at secondary level
- the opportunity for more able pupils to be stretched
- an end to disengagement

With regard to upper secondary education, this meant increased choice of what to study and where to study with the possibility of studying academic and vocational subjects, the introduction of specialised diplomas at foundation, intermediate (GCSE) and advanced levels, and which employers would take the lead in designing, the possibility for particularly able pupils to take higher education modules whilst still in upper secondary education, *but that the A level and GCSE would be retained as the 'cornerstones' of the new system.* In essence, the government rejected the main suggestion of 'The Tomlinson Report' though the introduction of diplomas was to be a key feature of reform. Ruth Kelly, education secretary at the time, wrote of the government agenda, "This major package of reform seizes a once-in-a-generation chance to transform 14-19 education and skills. Through doing so, we will seek to widen opportunity for all young people and take the next steps towards a more prosperous and fairer society" (2005a:9).

Since then a number of changes to the system have been piloted including a range of vocational GCSEs. *Functional skills* in English, Maths and ICT, which will be part of the diplomas, are to be piloted in 2008, and the first five *specialised* (vocational) diplomas are to be available between 2008 and 2010 with nine others to follow. A *general* (academic) diploma will be available from 2011. The specialised diplomas are created through multi-agency Diploma Development

Partnerships (DDPs) and are led by the relevant Sector Skills Council in liaison with employers, key stakeholders, higher education representatives, and other educational professionals. Thus what we see is the implementation of a strategy for education which aims to cater to a multiplicity of interests including the possible tensions between traditional qualifications and the marketisation of education.

4.5.2 Norway

4.5.2.1 Upper secondary education - historically

Norwegian education is 'Education for All' regardless of where in Norway a child lives, their sex, social or cultural background or physical ability - "The aim of education is to furnish children, young people and adults with the tools they need to face the tasks of life and surmount its challenges together with others. Education shall provide learners with the capability to take charge of themselves and their lives, as well as with the vigour and will to stand by others" (KUF, 1997b:5). This was, and is, the goal of the 'unitary school', aimed at being an egalitarian school for everybody irrespective of social background and domicile. Such a line of thinking first became dominant amongst socialists in the period 1910 to 1920. Stronger links between the various levels of the educational system were emphasised which, in the late 1920s, led to a new system of seven years of compulsory education in which upper secondary education (first established in the late 1890s) became formally linked to the lower stages of the system.

On a parallel level, vocational education and training were developing within Norway and had become more formalised after the turn of the century. Vocational training had been managed by the guilds and, for hundreds of years, master craftsmen in all recognised occupations had taken on apprentices. In 1933 the National Council for Vocational Training was established consisting of representatives from the Craftsmen's Association, Industry, and from the Ministry of Education. An Act was passed in 1940, proposed by the board, in which various vocational schools were to be set up. The Act was fully implemented in 1945 when all young people wishing to participate in vocational training were entitled to a place. In time this led to the expansion of what vocational education meant, from simply focusing upon crafts to over 110 recognised occupations by 1980.

In 1965 the Norwegian government appointed a school commission (the 'Steen Commission') to consider the future of upper secondary education. By this time, most young people expected to continue their studies beyond the age of 16 and politicians had come to believe that vocational education should be integrated into upper secondary. However, the Commission went further than simply addressing practical concerns. Lindbekk (2001) writes, "....the new Commission also should work out a plan providing *equal opportunities* for 'education and personality growth' for all

16 to 19 year olds." The plan for the new system was presented to the government in 1967 with five key points:-

- The educational system should pursue a principle of comprehensiveness, including common buildings, principals, and administrative bodies regardless of the academic or vocational content of the courses.
- Vocational courses should include a theoretical dimension.
- It should be possible for pupils to follow a combination of academic and vocational courses.
- It should be possible for pupils to move more freely between various programmes.
- All pupils should have the right to upper secondary education and entry should not be based upon grades.

Thus the Commission focused upon ensuring that academic and vocational courses were recognised equally within the educational system and that pupils were able to maintain the possibility of choosing different options for as long as possible, as well as providing equal access for pupils regardless of ability.

In practice, the reform which followed meant that the existing academic schools (*gymnas*) were to be merged with the six vocational lines (mercantile, industrial, maritime, agricultural, aesthetic, and household). This was not a straightforward measure to implement since all vocations differed in content, tradition, working methods, ways of funding and were governed by different education acts and administrative bodies. Various initiatives were trialled throughout Norway before the Parliament (*Storting*) passed a new *Upper Secondary Education Act* (1974) which was introduced in 1976. It was at this point that upper secondary schools all became known as *videregående skole* or 'further-going schools'.

The principles laid down in the 1974 Act took some time to be implemented nationally. It was the responsibility of the 19 counties to apply them but this led to an uneven distribution of opportunities. The main issue was the extent to which academic and vocational options were readily available for those wishing to study them. In the years immediately following the Act three quarters of pupils chose either the 'academic' or 'craft and industry' courses and thus only around a quarter chose one of the other five vocational lines (Lindbekk, 2001). Furthermore, there was a vast array of courses available at each level within the vocational subjects and yet the percentage of pupils choosing these options was disproportionately low in the second and third years of study because of what was available – the vocational courses were often run for a one year period as opposed to the traditional three year period in the academic subjects. After 1975 Oslo and its neighbouring county, Akershus, became very different from the other counties in that they focussed

more heavily upon the academic line of study. In 1981, the national average for choosing the academic subjects was 33% whereas for Oslo it was 51.7% and for Akershus, 41.6% (Lindbekk, 2001). She writes, "During the developments 1970 to 1983, some counties were consistently ahead of the others in faithfulness to the multi-line principle" (pg 82).

4.5.2.2 Upper secondary education - today

In the late 1980s discussions began to focus upon the need for reforming the educational system in line with international trends, new technology, and developments in the type of knowledge needed to sustain the country economically. Research resulted in green papers about life long learning, adult education, and all levels of the educational system. Such discussions formed the basis for the reforms which followed in the 1990s. In 1994, *Reform '94 (upper secondary education and training)* was passed. Until this point the main acts governing vocational education and training at upper secondary school had been the 1974 *Act on Upper Secondary Education Act* and the 1980 *Act on Vocational Training*. These both underwent substantial changes in the *Reform '94* process. Vocational education and training became fully integrated into the upper secondary education system in a way in which earlier attempts had failed and is undoubtedly the most important Norwegian policy with regard to this study. This same year, a reform in higher education was implemented.

The introduction of *Reform '94* (passed by the parliament on June 16th 1992) was meant to reflect the changes taking place in society and in the education system over the previous 20 years. One of the main goals was to create a flexible system that would prepare individuals with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills for a changing environment whilst also maintaining a decentralised school system. The main changes which came about as a result of the reform were as follows:-

- All 16-19 year olds have the right to three years' upper secondary education. This period can be extended to five years for pupils with special needs and to four years for those studying vocational subjects if their course includes two years in school and a two year apprenticeship. Furthermore, all pupils have the right to study one of three foundation courses of their choice. Should a pupil have special needs they have the right to their first choice. It is the responsibility of the county to ensure sufficient numbers of places to meet this new entitlement. Such rights only apply to those pupils who enter upper secondary education immediately following lower secondary schooling or, at the latest, one year after.
- From the Autumn of 2000, adults born after January 1st 1978 have a statutory right to upper secondary education.

- The working community in each county will specify the number of apprentices required so that the county can provide additional places within schools should pupil demands exceed the needs of the community.
- The final certificate will provide pupils with the opportunity to move on to the next stage in the education system in a more systematic and efficient way.
- It will be easier for pupils with vocational qualifications to gain additional qualifications for entry into higher education.
- The county has a legal obligation to follow-up individuals who drop out of the educational system, that is, those who are unemployed, those who have not applied for or been accepted as apprentices, or those who leave their studies in the middle of the school year.
- The number of foundation courses has been reduced from over a hundred to thirteen. This had its most notable impact upon vocational lines of study. The new foundation courses have a more general educational content and pupils delay specialisation until their second year.
- Teacher guidelines have been co-ordinated so that a single set of guidelines applies to all types of upper secondary education. The curricula for all subjects was completely revised.

(KUF, 1994a, KUF, 1994b, KUF, 1994c, KUF, 2002)

In 1997, further reforms to the structure and content of the educational system were made in compulsory education in *Grunnskolereformen (1997)* otherwise known as *The Compulsory School Reform* or *Reform '97* (KUF, 1997a). The school starting age was lowered to six thereby extending the period of compulsory education to 10 years, foreign language training was strengthened, after-school activities were established, and a core curriculum (L97) was introduced (KUF, 1997b). The core curriculum formulates the objectives of education by looking at the characteristics of human personality, for example, 'the spiritual human being', 'the creative human being', and so on. This Act was meant to strengthen the comprehensive nature of the education system and thus further incorporate different types of education and training within one system. As of 1997 the 19 counties took full responsibility for the 535 upper secondary schools nationally and for apprenticeship measures.

In 1998 *'the Competence Reform'* (KUF, 1997-1998a, KUF, 1997-1998b) was introduced as a means of ensuring all adults met their full potential in the labour market and in 1999 the *New Act Concerning Primary, Lower Secondary and Upper Secondary Education*, otherwise known as *'the Education Act'* was passed (KUF, 1999). This Act was produced as a revision to those individual acts described above such that a single legislature could cover all aspects of the educational system including vocational training. It states, with regard to upper secondary education,

> The purpose of upper secondary education is to develop the skills, understanding and responsibility that prepare pupils for life at work and in society, to provide a foundation for further education, and to assist them in their personal development. Upper secondary education shall contribute to increased awareness and understanding of basic Christian and humanist values, our national cultural heritage, democratic ideals and scientific thought and method. Upper secondary education shall promote human equality and equal rights, intellectual freedom and tolerance, ecological understanding and international co-responsibility (KUF, 1997b:front inside cover, 1999).

4.6 Careers Education and Guidance

4.6.1 England

The Education Act of 1997 was the first legislature in England to include careers education and guidance (CEG) in the school curriculum. There were three requirements:-

- Schools and colleges were responsible for working with the careers service by providing appropriate facilities.
- Schools and colleges made available impartial advice and information to pupils.
- Schools provided a programme of careers education for pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11, that is, between the ages of 13 and 16*.

* From September 2004 this requirement was extended to include pupils from the age of 11 years.

'Careers Education and Guidance in England: A National Framework 11-19' was produced in March 2003 (DfES, 2003). This document provides non-statutory guidance and is the key document for those working within the careers service within education. Known as 'The National Framework', the document claims that careers education is a key factor in both the successful transition of pupils from lower secondary education into upper secondary and in whether or not pupils are more or less likely to drop out of upper secondary education. In it, the government refers to individually tailored programmes in order to meet the aspirations and full potential of pupils by giving them skills to make informed choices and to manage their own progression. The three aims of the programme are:- self development, career exploration, and career management.

The focus of the government in career education is mainly upon lower secondary-aged pupils and 'The National Framework' provides age-related learning outcomes and examples of lessons. It does, however, recommend that schools and colleges providing upper secondary education also pursue similar programmes of study. These 'lessons' can be covered in a separately timetabled programme, as part of tutorial sessions, free-standing events, as part of other subject areas, or as a part of independent self-study periods. They might include pupils producing personal adverts, debating men's and women's jobs, developing a strategy for organising their time, investigating post-18 pathways, and identifying goals three-five years ahead. External support may come from

employers or those working in the community who may visit schools and make presentations. Pupils may also use computer-based programmes such as *Kudos*, *Streets Ahead, CareerQuest* or *The Real Game.*

The importance of continued guidance in upper secondary pupils is evident from a statement made in the recently published government document 'End to End Review of Careers Education and Guidance', (DfES, 2005b:13), "....young people by the age of 19 should have acquired the career development skills, work habits, knowledge and understanding to make mature informed decisions about employment and associated learning progression". Thus careers guidance is intended as a continual process of learning and acquisition of skills throughout the secondary years.

'Connexions'

As part of the CEG service, a new organisation, 'Connexions' was developed in 2001, born out of the existing careers service. The main aim of this organisation is to identify those pupils who are experiencing difficulties within education and may need additional support in making their choices. The remit of those working within Connexions can be broad and can include, for example, substance abuse, housing, religion or family problems.

4.6.2 Norway

Although the main guidance services have been based within schools for some time, it is only since 2002 that it became the formal responsibility of the education system. Prior to this it was the responsibility of the Directorate of Labour under the Employment Act of 1947. New regulations also integrate other policy concerns with participation in life-long learning, social equity, labour-market efficiency, gender segregation in educational choices, a bias towards choosing academic subjects, and with high drop out rates in pupils from ethnic backgrounds (OECD, 2002:4).

Legally, pupils have a right to careers and educational guidance and to support in social matters, the extent of which is largely the decision of individual schools. This role is carried out by teachers who may or may not have additional duties. The careers guidance teacher is known as the *rådgiver* (advice giver) whilst the teacher concerned with social matters is the *sosiallærer* (social teacher). In some cases the same teacher may hold both positions.

Educational and vocational guidance are treated as interdisciplinary topics which are covered within the Norwegian and social science classes and are the responsibility of the whole school. The role of the *rådgiver*, therefore, is a co-ordinating one. Lesson content can include consideration of different jobs, producing curriculum vitae, and use of the Internet or the programme *Veivalg* ('Which way?') which helps pupils develop an awareness of their interests and skills.

The main focus of careers advice begins in Class 8, that is, when pupils enter lower secondary school. In addition to in-class advice, pupils are also allocated to one week's work experience in Class 9 and sometimes in Class 10 as well. A particular focus upon careers guidance naturally takes place in the pupil's final year in lower secondary school in preparation for the transition into upper secondary education. The *rådgiver* is responsible for this transition and is required to follow the pupil's progress for 12 months following the move.

Youth follow-up service (*Oppfølgingstjeneste)*

The follow up service was set up under the 1994 Reform. It is run as a body subordinate to the county school authorities and its aim is to provide necessary information, guidance and practical assistance to pupils in the hope that those experiencing difficulties within the educational system may improve their access to the labour market through acquisition of some form of partial qualification. All pupils aged 16-19 who are not in school or work, therefore, fall within the responsibility of this service.

4.7 Summary of Chapter Findings

As noted in the opening section to this chapter, two countries which one might suppose are very similar, based upon current political and economic developments, are very different as a result of historical influences upon cultural development. This conclusion is pivotal to the study since it is located within a socio-cultural framework; cultural experiences are considered to shape the perspectives and mind set of those living within a given culture. Table 5, below, summarises the *key* similarities and differences between England and Norway.

Briefly, we see that the marketisation of education within England is dominant compared with Norway although there are indications that changes within Norway are moving in the same direction. We also see that the educational system in England is largely focused upon individual rights compared with the collective approach of Norway. This is translated into the structure of the system, and is apparent, for example, in levels of subject choice and specialisation in upper secondary schooling. The largely 'top-down' approach in Norway's social democracy may go some way towards explaining mass post-compulsory education for more than 20 years. Finally, careers guidance is far more developed within England, with a greater focus upon individual decision-making and preparation for life long-learning.

Table 5 Comparison of key cultural factors in England and Norway

	England	Norway
Background	Neo-liberal	Social democracy
	Marketisation of education	Limited marketisation
Educational traditions	Essentialism	Encyclopaedic
	Humanism	Naturalism/Rationalism
	Pluralism (*privatist-individualist*)	Collectivism (partial)
	Differentiation by ability and socio-economic background	Differentiation by ability
Educational System	Incoherent system	Coherent system
	Specialism of curriculum	Breadth of curriculum
	Academic/vocational divide	Academic/vocational divide
	Promoting apprenticeships	Established apprenticeships
	Externally assessed	Internally and externally assessed
Educational Policy	Undergoing reform:-	Reform well-established:-
	Increased participation	Increased participation
	Coherent framework	Coherent framework
Careers Education	Scheduled classes	Cross-curricular activities

The following two chapters (Chapters Five and Six) outline the findings of the analyses which were conducted upon the questionnaire and interview data. The findings are presented according to the different phases of the study rather than thematically, the reasons for this decision having been discussed previously (see section 3.6.2).

Chapter Five - Phase I - Questionnaire Data

The following chapter outlines the findings of the questionnaire phase of the study. Only the comparative results are presented unless it is deemed essential that the within-country analysis be included. Supporting analyses, including background factors for each of the two samples, can be found in Appendix 11. The analysis within this chapter involved *pupil opinions and responses* to the question items (section 5.2), and *patterns and themes* within the data (section 5.3). The chapter concludes with some provisional findings (section 5.4).

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of the questionnaires was primarily as a means of selecting pupils for interview. It was also intended, however, that the results would triangulate with the interview data, as well as provide a good understanding of the sample from which the interviewees were drawn, particularly when viewed in conjunction with the selection criteria (see section 3.3.1). The questionnaire data contributed towards answering research questions 2 and 3, as follows:-

2. What are the decision-making experiences of pupils in upper secondary education in England and Norway concerned with educational and career choices, and what are the major similarities and differences between the two countries?

3. How do factors such as gender, race and class affect the experiences of pupils in upper secondary education in England and Norway, particularly in relation to choice and access?

Findings

The findings of this study suggest that pupils from England and Norway experience upper secondary education in very different ways. Norwegian pupils, on the whole, are satisfied with their experience but there are specific issues which are of concern to them. They were more likely to believe that the educational system was only fair to those who had good grades, they did not feel they had received the amount of support they needed in making their choices, they believed that academic and vocational subjects had a differential status, and they were more likely to focus on what they had gained from outside school than inside it. Furthermore, they also appeared to be more passive in their approach than the English pupils and aware of their position within the hierarchy of the educational system. Their concern appeared to be with what the system offered them rather than their active involvement in the decision-making process.

These findings compare with English pupils who appeared to be more active and to be better prepared for making evaluative judgements of their experiences. This tended to give them a more positive approach to their educational experience. Their particular concerns were with the influence of their GCSE grades and practical matters in making their choices, more of their friends were likely to have left school at 16, and they were more likely to consider dropping out of upper secondary education than Norwegian pupils. The one area in which the pupils in both countries tended to converge was in their awareness of the need to consider their future options and plans for employment or further education (see Pupil Opinions – common responses, Appendix 11).

With regard to research question 3 and the influence of background factors upon pupils decision-making, there also appeared to be very little consensus between the two countries suggesting that structural influences are enacted in very different ways as well. The influence of class and race were not apparent within the English sample and *gender* influenced only one question item; female pupils were less happy with the support they had received in the decision-making process than male pupils. In Norway, the influence of class was not apparent but *gender* tended to be slightly more predictive of pupils' responses than in England; female pupils were more influenced by their lower secondary grades in making their choices than male pupils, they felt more pressured to do well, and to feel a greater sense of urgency in planning for the future. *Ethnicity* proved to be predictive of pupils' responses to four of the question items in Norway. Pupils from non-white backgrounds were more likely to report being influenced by their parents in making their choices than white pupils, their friends were more likely to leave school at 16, they were less likely to be happy with the options which had been available, and they were more likely to have considered dropping out of upper secondary education. Such pupils were also more likely to live in rented accommodation, and their parents were less likely to have an upper secondary education or to be in employment (see Appendix 11).

The *subjects studied* also proved to affect pupils' perceptions. The common finding for both countries is that pupils studying purely academic subjects are more likely to be influenced by their lower secondary grades when making their choices than pupils studying vocational subjects or a mix of the two. Furthermore, that pupils' perceptions and their choice of subject (or course) were related was apparent for a number of the question items. Whether their choices were guided by their particular way of perceiving the decision-making process or whether they came to develop different perceptions after they had begun their course is unclear at this point in the thesis.

The overall conclusion in this chapter is that the influence of culture upon pupils' perspectives is pervasive in all but a few areas of the decision-making process.

5.2 Pupil opinions and responses

This section focuses upon the responses pupils gave to each of the 25 question items. Two hundred and seventy pupils, 112 English and 158 Norwegian, were asked to respond to 25 statements about their experience of upper secondary education, the decision-making process, and the choices available (see Appendices 2, 3 and 4). The pupils indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The statements were each phrased positively, negatively, or neutrally in their position towards upper secondary education to ensure that pupils did not develop a pattern in their responding. The choice of responses were as follows:- 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. The lack of a neutral option was intended to *force* pupils to make a decision. In some instances, however, this led to relatively high levels of non-response. When analysing missing information it was found that for questions 14, 16, and 19 the non-response rates were higher than 2.0%. However, for most other questions response rates were in excess of 99.0%. In the ultimate analysis the categories were collapsed to 'agree' and 'disagree' since this provided a more coherent picture of the results.

Each question was analysed separately using Pearson's chi-square, Yates' continuity corrected value of chi-square, or Fisher's exact test of probability, thereby providing information concerning levels of response by pupils within each category.

5.2.1 Comparative analysis

In this section the main focus of the analysis was upon whether pupils from England and Norway responded differently to the question items. Of the 25 question items, 15 elicited significantly different findings (item numbers 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 21) (see Appendix 12). The findings are presented below:-

2. My initial choices in upper secondary were influenced by my GCSE grades.

The choices of pupils from England were more likely to be influenced by their lower secondary grades than pupils from Norway.

Table 6 Measure of agreement with question item 2 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	59.8	40.2
	Norway	44.9	55.1
$\chi^2 = 5.231$, df = 1, p=0.022			

4. I think the educational system is only fair to those who have good grades.

Pupils from Norway were more likely to feel that the education system was only fair to those with good grades (64.7%) compared with those pupils from England (35.3%).

Figure 7 Measurement of agreement with question item 4 by *country*

Table 7 Measure of agreement with question item 4 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	49.1	50.9
	Norway	64.7	35.3
$\chi^2 = 5.926$, df = 1, p=0.015			

5. I think my current studies are very difficult compared to my previous education.

English pupils were more likely (72.3%) to agree with this statement than pupils from Norway (41.8%).

Figure 8 Measure of agreement with question item 5 by *country*

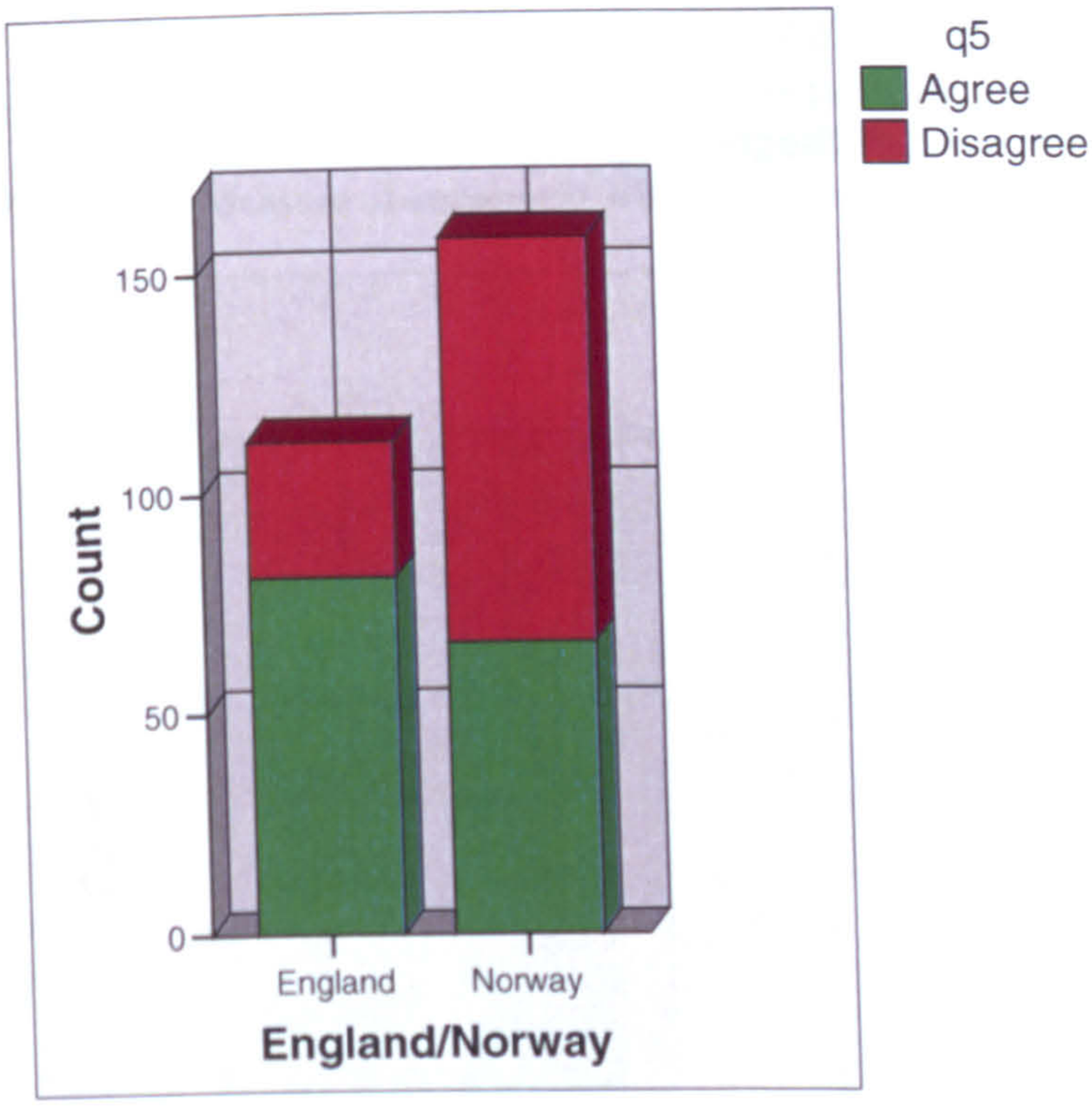


Table 8 Measure of agreement with question item 5 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	72.3	27.7
	Norway	41.8	58.2
χ^2 = 23.445, df = 1, p<0.0005			

6. Practical matters such as travel expenses influenced my choices about where to study.

Pupils from Norway were less likely to be influenced by practical matters in making their choices about where to study compared with pupils from England.

Table 9 Measure of agreement with question item 6 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	38.4	61.6
	Norway	18.4	81.6
χ^2 = 12.452, df = 1, p<0.0005			

8. I have never considered dropping out of upper secondary education.

Norwegian pupils were less likely to have considered dropping out than English pupils.

Figure 9 Measure of agreement with question item 8 by *country*

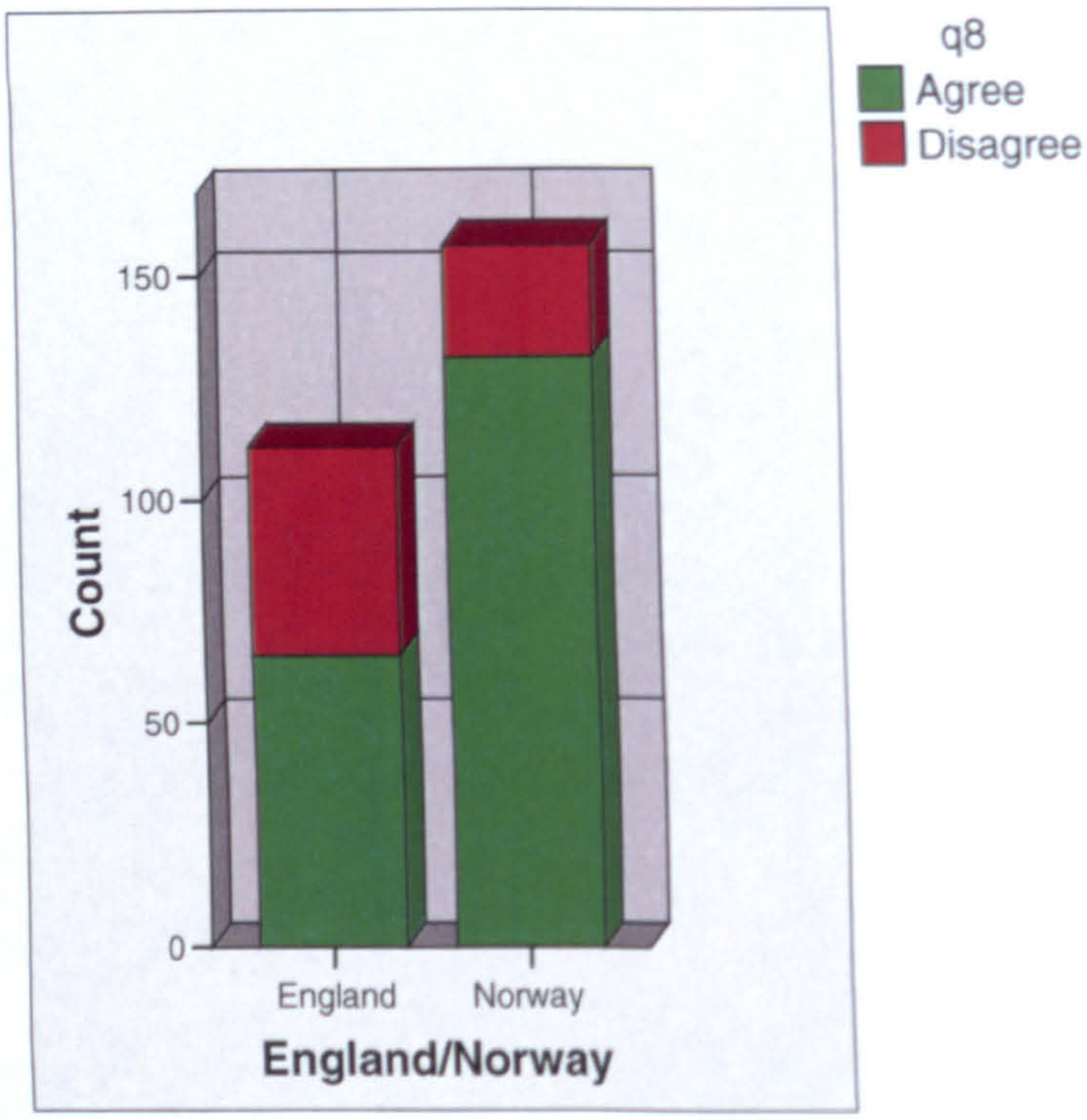


Table 10 Measure of agreement with question item 8 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	58.0	42.0
	Norway	84.1	15.9
$\chi^2 = 21.305$, df = 1, p<0.0005			

9. I only stay in upper secondary because there is nothing else for me to do.

The vast majority of pupils, regardless of which country they resided in, disagreed with this statement. There was, however, a significant difference between the two countries with 8.9% of pupils from England agreeing that they stayed on in upper secondary education because there was nothing else for them to do in comparison with 19.6% of pupils from Norway.

Table 11 Measure of agreement with question item 9 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	8.9	91.1
	Norway	19.6	80.4
$\chi^2 = 5.017$, df = 1, p=0.025			

11. In making my choices, I received all the support from my teachers that I needed.

25.9% of those from England were not satisfied with the level of support received compared with 59.0% of those from Norway.

Figure 10 Measure of agreement with question item 11 by *country*

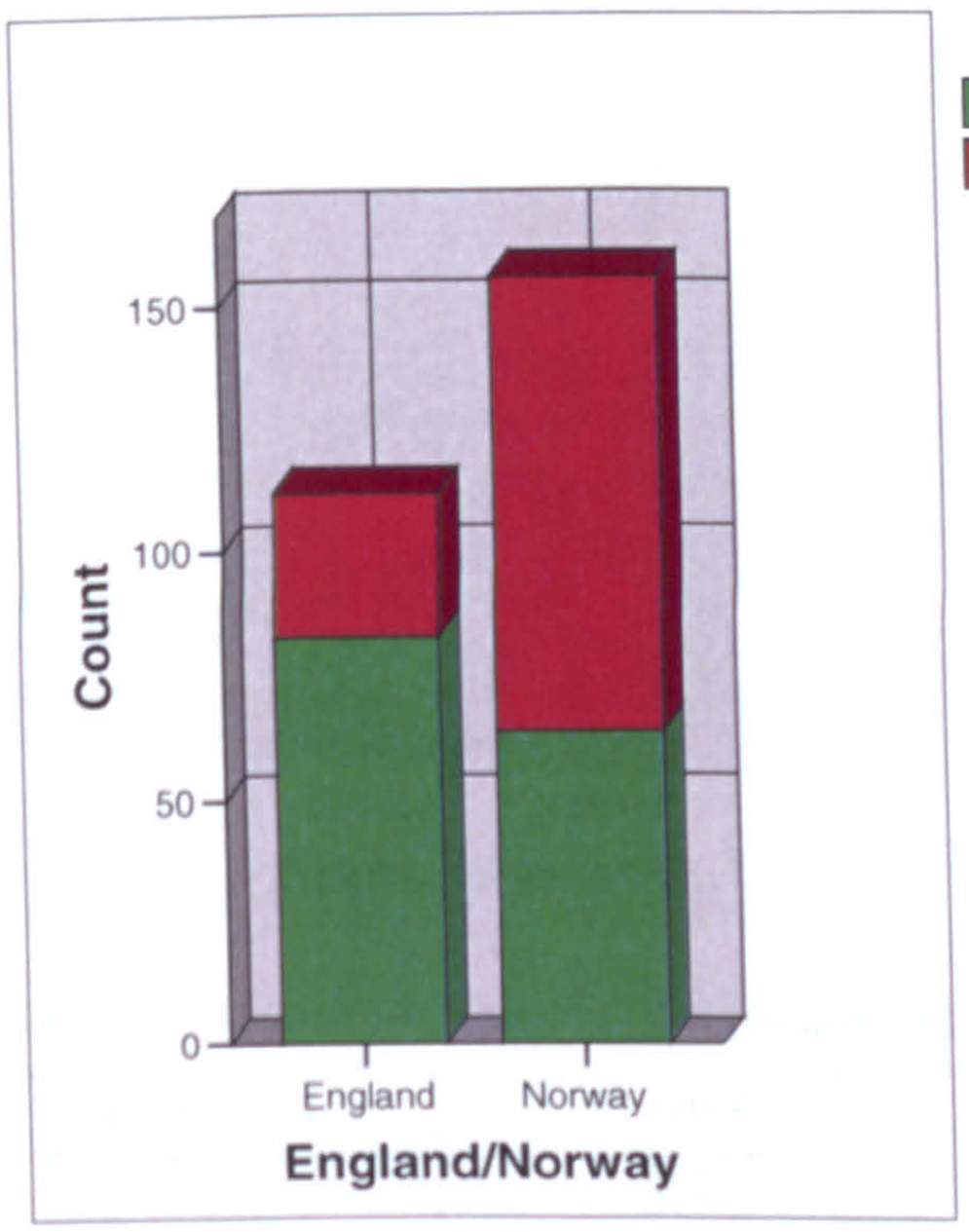


Table 12 Measure of agreement with question item 11 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	74.1	25.9
	Norway	41.0	59.0
$\chi^2 = 27.490$, df = 1, $p<0.0005$			

12. I am happy with the options that have been available to me since I finished my GCSEs.

Students residing within England were more likely to say that they were happy with the options that had been available to them since finishing their lower secondary education compared with those from Norway.

Figure 11 Measure of agreement with question item 12 by *country*

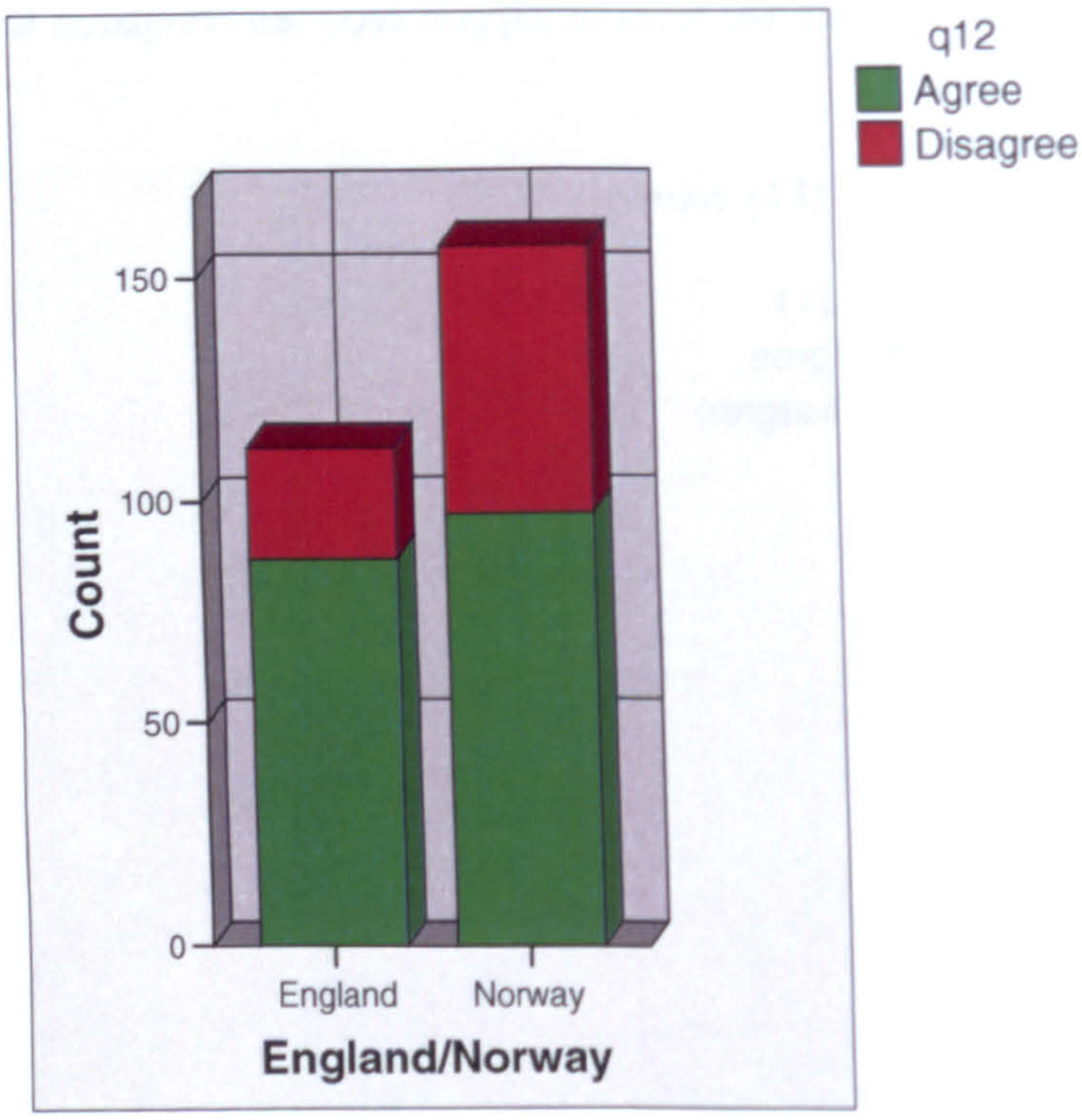


Table 13 Measure of agreement with question item 12 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	77.7	22.3
	Norway	61.8	38.2
$\chi^2 = 6.923$, df = 1, p=0.009			

13. I feel that I am an important and valued part of this school.

Pupils from England were more likely to report that they felt themselves to be an important and valued part of their school compared with pupils from Norway.

Table 14 Measure of agreement with question item 13 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	58.6	41.1
	Norway	41.7	58.3
$\chi^2 = 6.746$, df = 1, p=0.009			

14. I think that I gain more from what I learn outside school than I gain from inside it.

Pupils from Norway were more likely to feel that they gained more from what they learnt outside school compared with pupils from England.

Figure 12 Measure of agreement with question item 14 by *country*

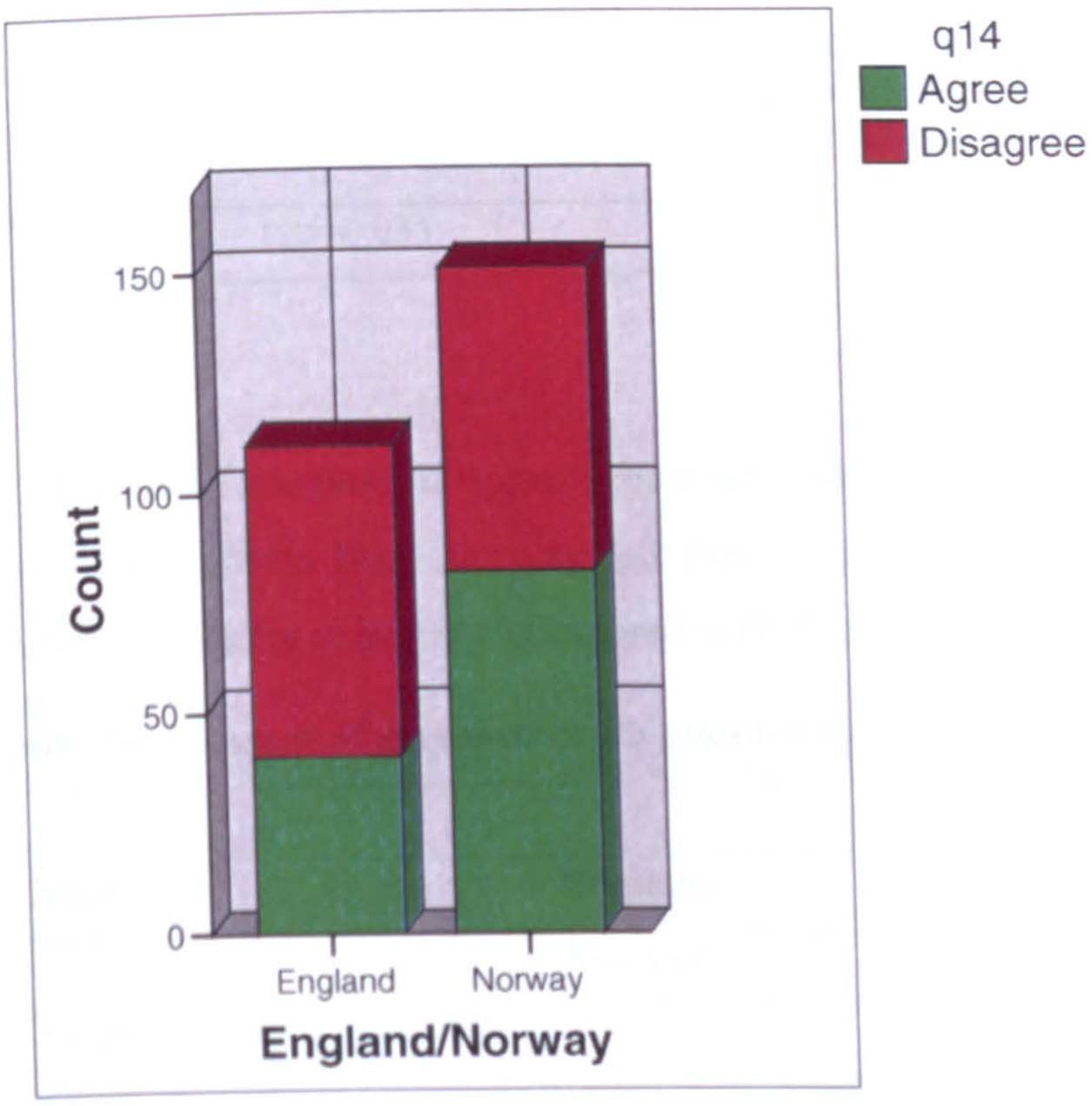


Table 15 Measure of agreement with question item 14 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	36.0	64.0
	Norway	54.3	45.7
$\chi^2 = 7.862$, df = 1, p=0.005			

15. When I do leave school, I will not be sad to go.

Pupils from Norway tended to agree with this statement whereas those from England were fairly evenly placed in terms of whether they agreed or disagreed.

Table 16 Measure of agreement with question item 15 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	49.1	50.9
	Norway	68.1	31.6
$\chi^2 = 9.307$, df = 1, p=0.002			

16. Academic and vocational courses have the same status.

Pupils from Norway were far more likely to disagree that academic and vocational courses have the same status than pupils from England.

Figure 13 Measure of agreement with question item 16 by *country*

Table 17 Measure of agreement with question item 16 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	41.7	58.3
	Norway	19.4	80.6
$\chi^2 = 14.469$, df = 1, p<0.0005			

17. Lots of my closest friends left school after their GCSEs.

Norwegian pupils were more likely to disagree with this statement than pupils from England.

Table 18 Measure of agreement with question item 17 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	30.4	69.6
	Norway	14.6	85.4
$\chi^2 = 8.740$, df = 1, p=0.003			

19. I think the government is doing a lot to help people after they have finished their GCSEs.

Pupils from England were more likely to feel that the government was doing a lot to help people after they had finished their lower secondary education than pupils from Norway.

Table 19 Measure of agreement with question item 19 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	45.0	55.0
	Norway	31.3	68.7
$\chi^2 = 4.454$, df = 1, p=0.035			

21. The main purpose of upper secondary education is to prepare pupils for university.

83.3% of students from Norway felt that the main purpose of upper secondary education was to prepare pupils for university compared with 53.6% of pupils from England.

Table 20 Measure of agreement with question item 21 by *country*

		Agree %	Disagree %
Country	**England**	53.6	46.4
	Norway	83.3	16.7
$\chi^2 = 26.563$, df = 1, p<0.0005			

Summary

English and Norwegian pupils experience upper secondary education in very different ways. Although it would seem that, on the whole, pupils in both countries were satisfied with their choices and the decision-making processes which surrounded their upper secondary education, the Norwegian pupils tended to respond less favourably.

In terms of significant differences, Norwegian pupils were more likely than English pupils to say that the system was only fair to those who had good grades, that they did not receive the amount of support they needed in making their choices, that they gained more outside school than in it, and that academic and vocational courses did not have the same status. In addition, more Norwegian pupils than English pupils were likely to say that they only stayed in upper secondary because there was nothing else for them to do although this may be a more factual response than an emotive one as the majority did report being happy that they had continued their education.

The choices which English pupils made were more influenced by their lower secondary grades and practical matters than Norwegian pupils, they were more likely to feel that their current studies were difficult in comparison with previous studies, more of their friends were likely to have left school at 16, and whilst those who stayed in upper secondary seemed to have chosen to do so, English pupils were more likely to have considered dropping out. However, they were more likely to report being happy with the options which were available to them, and viewed the government as being supportive in helping pupils in post-compulsory education.

5.2.2 Background Factors

The central concern within the previous section was the possibility of differential patterns between the English and Norwegian samples. A further key issue, in answering research question 3, was to establish whether background factors might lead to differential patterns of pupils' experiences between the two countries. Those background factors which were identified in this analysis were *gender, ethnicity,* and *socio-economic status.* The nature of the *subjects studied* was also included since it was a criterion for selecting pupils for interview and, therefore, played a significant part in the study.

England

Background factors did not tend to be predictive of pupil responses within England. Only two of the background factors (*gender* and *subjects studied*) proved to be statistically significant, and these related to just four of the questions (item numbers 2, 6, 11 and 16). The findings are presented below:-

Gender

11. In making my choices, I received all the support from my teachers that I needed.

Male pupils were more likely to feel that they had received a sufficient amount of support from their teachers than female pupils.

Table 21 Measure of agreement with question item 11 in England by *gender*

England		Agree %	Disagree %
Gender	Male	85.7	14.3
	Female	65.1	34.9
$\chi^2 = 5.088$, df = 1, p=0.024			

Subjects studied

2. My initial choices in upper secondary were influenced by my GCSE* grades.

Those students who were pursuing a vocational course were less likely to believe that their GCSE grades had influenced their choices in upper secondary school.

Table 22 Measure of agreement with question item 2 in England by *subjects*

England		Agree %	Disagree %
Subjects studied	Academic	67.5	32.5
	Vocational	26.1	73.9
	Academic/Vocational	77.8	22.2
$\chi^2 = 14.060$, df = 2, p=0.001			

* GCSE was translated to lower secondary grades (*ungdomsskolekarakter*) in the Norwegian version of the questionnaire.

6. Practical matters such as travel expenses influenced my choices about where to study.

No single pupil who had chosen to study a mix of academic and vocational subjects felt that practical matters had influenced their choices. This compares with 40% of academic students and 47.8% of vocational students.

Table 23 Measure of agreement with question item 6 in England by *subjects*

England		Agree %	Disagree %
Subjects studied	**Academic**	40.0	60.0
	Vocational	47.8	52.2
	Academic/Vocational	0	100.0
$\chi^2 = 6.561$, df = 2, p=0.038			

11. In making my choices, I received all the support from my teachers that I needed.

Vocational students were less likely to feel that they had received the amount of support from their teachers that they needed when making choices about upper secondary education.

Table 24 Measure of agreement with question item 11 in England by *subjects*

England		Agree %	Disagree %
Subjects studied	**Academic**	82.5	17.5
	Vocational	39.1	60.9
	Academic/Vocational	88.9	11.1
$\chi^2 = 18.625$, df = 2, p<0.0005			

16. Academic and vocational courses have the same status.

Academic students were the least likely to believe that academic and vocational courses had the same status. Those who were studying a mix of the two were the most likely to agree.

Table 25 Measure of agreement with question item 16 in England by *subjects*

England		Agree %	Disagree %
Subjects studied	**Academic**	35.1	64.9
	Vocational	50.0	50.0
	Academic/Vocational	77.8	22.2
$\chi^2 = 6.838$, df = 2, p=0.033			

Norway

Within the Norwegian analysis three background factors (*gender, ethnicity* and *subjects studied*) had a bearing upon the responses of the pupils to 12 of the questions (item numbers 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 12, 14, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24). The findings are described below.

Gender

2. My initial choices in upper secondary were influenced by my lower secondary grades.

Male pupils were more likely to disagree with this statement than female pupils.

Table 26 Measure of agreement with question item 2 in Norway by *gender*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Gender	Male	34.5	65.5
	Female	53.8	46.2
$\chi^2 = 4.593$, df = 1, p=0.032			

14. I think that I gain more from what I learn outside school than I gain from inside it.

Male pupils felt that they gained more from what they learnt outside school than inside in comparison with female pupils.

Table 27 Measure of agreement with question item 14 in Norway by *gender*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Gender	Male	66.1	33.9
	Female	45.5	54.5
$\chi^2 = 5.047$, df = 1, p=0.025			

18. I feel pressured to do well at school.

Female pupils were more likely to feel pressured to do well at school than male pupils.

Table 28 Measure of agreement with question item 18 in Norway by *gender*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Gender	Male	64.9	35.1
	Female	83.5	16.5
$\chi^2 = 5.727$, df = 1, p=0.017			

24. I do not have much time before I need to think about my future career plans.

Female pupils were more likely to feel that the need to think about future career plans was imminent compared with male pupils.

Table 29 Measure of agreement with question item 24 in Norway by *gender*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Gender	**Male**	75.9	24.1
	Female	92.5	7.5
$\chi^2 = 6.903$, df = 1, p=0.009			

Ethnicity

7. What my parents wanted me to study influenced my choices.

Non-white pupils were more likely to be influenced by their parents in making choices about their future compared with white pupils.

Table 30 Measure of agreement with question item 7 in Norway by *ethnicity*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Ethnicity	**White**	13.3	86.7
	Non-white	38.9	61.1
Fisher's test of probability, p=0.013			

8. I have never considered dropping out of upper secondary education.

Non-white pupils were more likely to have considered dropping out of upper secondary education than their white counterparts.

Table 31 Measure of agreement with question item 8 in Norway by *ethnicity*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Ethnicity	**White**	86.7	13.3
	Non-white	66.7	33.3
Fisher's test of probability, p=0.040			

12. I am happy with the options that have been available to me since I finished my GCSEs.

Non-white pupils were more likely to disagree with this statement (66.7%) with statement than white pupils (36.7%).

Table 32 Measure of agreement with question item 12 in Norway by *ethnicity*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Ethnicity	**White**	63.3	36.7
	Non-white	33.3	66.7
$\chi^2 = 4.700$, df = 1, p=0.030			

17. Lots of my closest friends left school after their GCSEs.

Whilst exactly half of non-white pupils reported that many of their closest friends had left school at the end of lower secondary school, only 10.2% of white pupils did so.

Table 33 Measure of agreement with question item 17 in Norway by *ethnicity*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Ethnicity	**White**	10.2	89.8
	Non-white	50.0	50.0
Fisher's test of probability, $p<0.0005$			

Subjects studied

1. My earlier education has been a good basis for my current studies.

Pupils who were studying solely academic subjects tended to agree that their earlier studies had been a good basis for their present education compared with pupils who were studying vocational subjects alongside additional academic options.

Table 34 Measure of agreement with question item 1 in Norway by *subjects*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Subjects studied	**Academic**	88.8	11.2
	Academic/Vocational*	73.8	26.2
$\chi^2 = 5.374$, df = 1, p=0.020			

* The combination of academic and vocational subjects in Norway arises through the *påbygging* option chosen by the vocational students as a means of gaining the opportunity to later enter higher education.

2. My initial choices in upper secondary were influenced by my lower secondary grades.

Pupils studying a mix of academic and vocational courses were less likely (28.6%) to have been influenced by their lower secondary grades than pupils following purely academic subjects (50.9%).

Table 35 Measure of agreement with question item 2 in Norway by *subjects*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Subjects studied	**Academic**	50.9	49.1
	Academic/Vocational	28.6	71.4
$\chi^2 = 6.192$, df = 1, p=0.013			

3. On the whole, I think my lower secondary results reflect my true ability.

Students studying a mix of academic and vocational courses tended to feel that their lower secondary results did not reflect their true ability.

Table 36 Measure of agreement with question item 3 in Norway by *subjects*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Subjects studied	**Academic**	60.0	40.0
	Academic/Vocational	29.3	70.7
$\chi^2 = 11.435$, df = 2, p=0.001			

17. Lots of my closest friends left school after their GCSEs.

Pupils studying academic subjects tended to be less likely to have had many friends leaving school at the end of their lower secondary schooling.

Table 37 Measure of agreement with question item 17 in Norway by *subjects*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Subjects studied	**Academic**	11.2	88.8
	Academic/Vocational	24.4	75.6
$\chi^2 = 4.211$, df = 1, p=0.040			

22. I do not think upper secondary really helps me to develop as a person.

Pupils studying a mix of academic and vocational subjects tended to believe upper secondary education did not help them to develop as a person compared with pupils pursuing only academic subjects.

Table 38 Measure of agreement with question item 22 in Norway by *subjects*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Subjects studied	**Academic**	31.0	69.0
	Academic/Vocational	48.8	51.2
$\chi^2 = 4.158$, df = 1, p=0.041			

23. I don't regret any of the choices I've made since finishing my GCSES.

Pupils studying academic subjects were more likely to disagree with this statement (56.5%) than pupils studying both academic and vocational subjects (35.7%).

Table 39 Measure of agreement with question item 23 in Norway by *subjects*

Norway		Agree %	Disagree %
Subjects studied	**Academic**	43.5	56.5
	Academic/Vocational	64.3	35.7
$\chi^2 = 5.330$, df = 1, p=0.021			

Summary

The comparability of the findings within this section varied according to the background factor being considered. The most obvious difference, however, is that background factors were far more predictive of pupils' responses in Norway than in England. In the former, there were 14 significant findings compared with 5 amongst the English data. It may be that this results from differential cell sizes in key areas, or it may be that there is far more consensus in the perceptions of the Norwegian pupils compared with the English. This suggestion is considered in the next section. The analysis in this section focused upon *gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status,* and *subjects studied.* The subjects studied seemed to be predictive of the pupils' responses in both countries, whilst socio-economic status had no bearing in either sample. *Ethnicity* and *gender* played an important part in Norway, with little or no impact upon the pupils' responses in England.

Within the English sample, gender elicited only one significant finding; male pupils were more likely than female pupils to feel they had received a sufficient amount of support from their teachers. In Norway, however, gender was a more evident influence. Female pupils appeared to be more involved in the decision-making process than male pupils; their choices were more likely to be influenced by their lower secondary grades; they felt more pressured to do well at school, and more pressured to make decisions about their future. Male pupils were more likely to focus on what they gained from outside school than female pupils.

In Norway, pupils from a non-white background seemed to be less satisfied with their options and more likely to consider dropping out of upper secondary schooling than white pupils. They were more likely to be influenced by their parents in making choices about upper secondary school than white pupils, and their closest friends were equally likely to leave school at 16 as continue their education. These findings suggest that strong cultural factors influence the experiences of non-white pupils in Norway.

Finally, the subjects the pupils studied were an important consideration in both countries. In Norway, pupils who had been studying a vocational course, with academic options, were generally less content that those studying purely academic subjects. In particular, they were less likely to believe their lower secondary grades had influenced their choice of upper secondary course, and they were less likely to believe that their grades reflected their true ability. If it is the case that pupils choose vocational courses because of lower grades, then it may be that the pupils studying the vocational/academic option are those who did not have sufficient grades for an academic course from the start but who felt they were capable of, or at least interested in, higher education. This being the case, it may explain why so many felt that their lower secondary grades did not reflect their true ability.

In England, it was found that students studying vocational courses were not influenced by their grades in making their choices. This may be related to stricter grade requirements for academic courses, or it might be that those who chose vocational courses did so for a specific reason. Such pupils may have chosen to opt-out of the traditional academic route. It is interesting, in light of this, that vocational students were less likely to feel that they had received a sufficient amount of support from their teachers in making their choices.

Those students in England who chose to study a combination of academic and vocational courses were the most likely to believe that they had the same status, perhaps because of their experience with the two, or perhaps because of their commitment to their decision. It was this group of pupils whose decisions were completely unaffected by practical matters, suggesting that their choices were influenced by some other overriding concern.

The conclusion that English and Norwegian pupils experience upper secondary education in very different ways is further supported by the next section which seeks to identify the ways in which the pupils conceptualise the main issues within their respective educational systems.

5.3 Patterns and Themes

Whilst the previous section involved the analysis of pupil responses to the question items, this section attempts to find 'themes' in the response patterns through factor analysis. This analysis involves a consideration of themes within the two countries and from these findings conclusions are drawn concerning comparative trends.

It should be noted that factor analysis only identifies patterns or clusters in responses. Each factor represents a particular way of perceiving a concept but it does not identify *what* that concept is; this is for the researcher to establish through consideration of the data.

England

In carrying out a factor analysis of the 25 questions it was possible to obtain a 7 factor data reduction which explained 59.2% of the original total variance. A cut off point of 0.4 for significant loadings (either greater than 0.4 or less than -0.4) was selected for the rotated component matrix. This accounted for 20 of the 25 items with the exception of questions 4, 6, 7, 17 and 22 (see table 59, Appendix 13). Each factor is presented below with an explanatory label.

Table 40 Labels and summary description of English factors

Factor labels	Summary description
1. Support from educational system	Support was offered to the pupil by the government, teachers, and the school.
2. Extrinsic gain from upper secondary	Pupil gain was understood in terms of extrinsic factors.
3. Pupil evaluation of their education	Pupils made judgements about their relationship with the school.
4. Temporal issues	Pupils considered other periods in their education.
5. Main purpose of upper secondary	Pupils experienced a 'sense of purpose' - upper secondary schooling was a process in which they were involved.
6. Evaluation of educational system	Pupils made judgements about broader educational issues.
7. Life beyond upper secondary	Pupils focused upon a period in time when they were no longer in upper secondary education.

The English pupils' responses grouped together under seven factors ranging from support, to extrinsic gains from the education system, to life after upper secondary education. English pupils did not seem to conform in what might be considered a 'common sense' approach to upper secondary, for example, upper secondary in relation to lower secondary, in relation to further studies and employment, and so on. There were also five question items which could not be analysed in terms of factors suggesting a sense of diversity in the patterns of responding of the pupils. Whether this reflects a lack of shared cultural approach to education because 'staying on' in England is a relatively new phenomenon, or whether it reflects individual choice and independence is unclear. Nevertheless, there was a clear picture of pupils being actively involved in their education and able to make judgements about it.

Norway

In carrying out a factor analysis of the 25 questions it was possible to obtain a 9 factor data reduction which explained 59.3% of the original total variance. A cut off point of 0.4 for significant loadings (either greater than 0.4 or less than -0.4) was selected for the rotated component matrix. This accounted for 24 of the 25 items with the exception of question 15 (see table 60, Appendix 13). Each factor is presented below with an explanatory label. Note that question 14 is included within factors 1 and 2, but is most significant within factor 1.

Table 41 Labels and summary description of Norwegian factors

Factor labels	Summary description
1. Intrinsic gain from upper secondary	Pupil gain was understood in terms of personal gain.
2. Support in decision-making	The concept of support was related to how it was received by the pupils.
3. Lower secondary as preparation for upper secondary	Pupils considered their grades and earlier studies.
4. Positioning oneself	Pupils compared themselves with others or their current situation with that of the past.
5. Influence of outside agencies	Pupils were aware of the influence of the government and educational system.
6. Life beyond upper secondary	The focus was upon the future and, specifically, career aspirations.
7. Remaining in upper secondary	Pupils focused upon issues related to continued studies within upper secondary education.
8. Choices after lower secondary	Pupils focused upon major decisions made following lower secondary.
9. Main purpose of upper secondary	Upper secondary education was viewed as directly related to continued education and/or employment.

Norwegian pupils seemed to view their role in upper secondary as a passive one in the sense that they were recipients rather than agents. This was apparent in two ways. Firstly, they viewed *gain* and *support* in terms of what they personally received, whilst also being aware of the possible influences of outside agencies. Secondly, question items did not elicit any particularly remarkable themes. Instead, the themes cohered with the different stages and features of the education system of which upper secondary was just one part. This may be the result of a well-established system of upper secondary schooling, or more broadly, a clear ladder of progression which is understood and taken-for-granted by all.

Comparative Analysis

The English data produced seven factors and the Norwegian, nine factors. Each factor was given a conceptual label based upon the question items which contributed towards the factor. Clearly some understanding of the two educational systems was necessary in order to create such labels. These labels have been presented separately within the analyses above for ease of understanding. However, it is more pertinent to discuss the full reasoning behind each label in the context of comparative analyses. Since this section refers to key words within each factor, the reader may wish to refer to Appendix 13 in which each question item is listed.

There were three possible ways of making the comparison between the factors within England and within Norway:-

i. Factors which are conceptually *similar* because they contain *similar* question items.

ii. Factors which are conceptually *similar* but which contain *different* question items.

iii. Factors which are conceptually *different* because they contain *different* question items.

The comparison and a discussion of the findings is presented below.

Understanding similar factors (part 1)

i. Factors which are conceptually similar because they contain similar question items

England, Factor 1 and Norway, Factor 2 - Support

The pupils from the two countries tended to view support similarly in the sense that in both countries this factor included question items 11 and 13. It was the only factor in which two question items coincided which highlights the disparity which existed in the pattern of responding between the two countries. Question items 11 and 13 referred to 'support from teachers in making choices' and 'whether the pupil felt a valued part of their school'. Although these two items have led to a very similar factor for the two countries, other question items also contribute. It is these which highlight the slight difference in the way in which the concept of 'support' is understood in England and Norway.

In Norway the idea of school support and the way in which pupils felt about school was also grouped with how happy they were with the options available to them, how practical matters had influenced their choices, and what they gained from school as a person. Thus *support* was specifically about how pupils *received support.* In England, however, question items 11 and 13 were grouped with question 19 in which pupils were asked about governmental help for pupils in upper secondary. This would suggest that what links this factor in England is the idea of who *offers support.* Key words in the questions for England, therefore, were *government, teachers,* and *school* whereas in Norway it was *received, options, available,* and *valued.*

Understanding similar factors (part 2)

ii. Factors which are conceptually similar but which contain different question items

England, Factor 5 and Norway, Factor 9 - Purpose of upper secondary

In both countries the purpose of upper secondary education was perceived as a means of preparing pupils for university. In Norway, however, this was also linked with question item 20 in which pupils were asked whether upper secondary education was important for future employment. English pupils chose question items that referred to their performance and their choices, that is,

question items 18 and 23. Thus, whilst the Norwegian pupils clearly focused upon the notion of *purpose*, the factor is a little vague conceptually within the English analysis. Key words within England might be *pressured, prepare,* and *regret.* The purpose of upper secondary would appear to focus upon their involvement in the process rather than a clearly defined link between education and other factors. Thus it might be better to describe the factor as 'purpose of upper secondary' for the Norwegian data but 'sense of purpose' for the English data.

England, Factor 2 and Norway, Factor 1 - Gain from upper secondary

There are no common question items within this factor and yet a very clear picture is apparent. In England there are two themes. Firstly, what they *gain extrinsically* - question items refer to *continued education, options available,* and *getting a job.* Secondly, the questions encourage evaluation and key words are *glad, happy,* and *important.*

In Norway, the focus within this factor is also upon gain but more upon *intrinsic gain.* Key words within the relevant question items were *nothing else for me, gain,* and *develop as a person.* Thus it would seem that the Norwegian pupils were recipients of their education compared with the English pupils who were more actively involved. This finding is not unrelated to the previous factor in which Norwegian pupils were more likely to view upper secondary as a means to an end whereas the English pupils were more engaged in their education. This also relates to the concept of support discussed above, and to the distinction between evaluation of other's performance and the influence of others made below. As with many issues raised within this analysis, such conclusions need to be explored more fully through the interview data.

England, Factor 7 and Norway, Factor 6 - Life beyond upper secondary

Question 24 featured in both countries, that is, the concern with a future career. However, other question items illustrated that in Norway the focus was clearly upon the *future* whereas, in England, pupils were focused upon *life outside school* rather than the future per se. This might reflect the structure of the two educational systems in which the English system is a plethora of choice whilst the Norwegian system is more streamlined and straightforward and the purpose of upper secondary education better established.

Understanding dissimilar factors

iii. Factors which are conceptually different because they contain different question items

The following factors *do not* converge conceptually between the two countries. It is, however, useful to consider how the items within England might differ from items within Norway and what might be learnt from this. Simply considering the titles of the factors it is clear that there are two groupings within the factors – (a) *involvement,* and (b) *temporal.*

(a) Involvement

Evaluation by the pupils is important within the English context whereas, in the Norwegian data, it is more about the *influence* of others or *positioning* oneself in relation to others.

England, Factor 3 - Pupil evaluation of their education

This factor focused upon the relationship of the pupil with their school. In this respect key issues were *earlier education, leaving school, GCSE results,* and *dropping out.* In fact, it could well be considered as pointing to transitions within the pupil's education. However, the factor has been labelled 'pupil evaluation' because there is also a strong element within it that asks pupils to make a judgement about their experience.

England, Factor 6 - Evaluation of educational system

This factor also calls for pupils to make a decision about the educational system but the two question items which contributed were concerned more with education from a broader perspective, that is, whether what is gained within school equals that gained outside of school, and whether academic and vocational courses have equal status.

Norway, Factor 4 - Positioning oneself

Whilst consideration of the question items would suggest that this factor is primarily concerned with the influence of significant others, that is, parents and friends, this might be slightly misleading. The inclusion of question item 5 in which pupils consider whether their current studies are difficult in comparison to their previous education suggests that another concept underlies this factor. It would seem that pupils are positioning themselves, either in relation to others or in comparing their current situation with an earlier experience. The notion of positioning oneself is a theme which links in with other factors in which Norwegian pupils appear to perceive themselves as having a place within a system.

Norway, Factor 5 - Influence of outside agencies

Key words for this factor were *government, educational system, fair,* and *pressured.* The Norwegian pupils seemed to be more aware of their position in a hierarchy. This is an interesting finding when one reflects upon the way in which the pupils in England viewed outside agencies either in terms of the possible support that could be offered, or in terms of evaluating how well their needs were being met.

(b) Temporal

The Norwegian pupils were more likely to group the question items according to periods in time. Lower secondary education seemed an important element in this. For the English pupils the past and the future were grouped within a single factor.

England, Factor 4 - Temporal issues

This factor relates upper secondary to other periods in the pupil's educational experience - their future plans, previous education, and the influences of GCSE grades.

Norway, Factor 3 - Lower secondary as preparation for upper secondary

All three question items within this factor related directly to lower secondary schooling and its impact upon the choices that pupils made in upper secondary. Key words were *results, true ability, initial choices,* and *earlier education.*

Norway, Factor 7 - Remaining in upper secondary

Items 10 and 8 both refer to continued education.

Norway, Factor 8 - Choices after lower secondary

The key concept within this factor appears to relate to the choices pupils made after their lower secondary education. Question item 23 refers specifically to this but question 16 refers to the status of academic and vocational courses. The reason for this appears to be with the structure of the Norwegian educational system. The main choice that pupils make at the end of their lower secondary schooling is whether to pursue an academic or vocational course.

Conclusions

There were two key issues which emerged from the analyses - how active pupils were in their involvement within education, and how upper secondary schooling was contextualised within the system as a whole. Norwegian pupils appeared to have a sense of what upper secondary education was for and its place within the educational system. Factors highlighted a common sense approach to the system - lower secondary factors, remaining in upper secondary education, and future plans. Norwegian pupils were also clearly aware of the purpose of upper secondary. This contrasted with the English data in which there was no chronological pattern which dominated and only one factor which could singularly be attributed to temporal issues. As has already been noted, this different approach may result from the extent to which upper secondary education is established within the different countries and whether a cultural (nationally-shared) approach has been developed. It may not, however, be unrelated to the second key issue, that of pupil involvement.

In terms of pupil involvement within education the English pupils were more active. Factors focused upon evaluation of the system and of the pupil's individual experience, as well as support and gain as extrinsic experiences. For the Norwegian pupils, however, they appeared to be aware of themselves as positioned within a system. They were aware of the influence of outside agencies, they did not appear to evaluate the system, and they viewed support and involvement passively in terms of what they received personally. The link between this conclusion and that above may come

in the structure of the system. One which is well-established and streamlined with most students remaining within upper secondary education may not require individual involvement. It may be that the system does not need pupils to make active decisions and, in turn, that breeds a more passive approach to education.

5.4 Summary of Chapter Findings

The two research questions, to which the questionnaire data provides some provisional answers, were concerned with the *experiences* of pupils in upper secondary education and how these experiences may be *similar or different* for pupils in England and Norway. Furthermore, whether key *background factors* affected pupil experiences, particularly in relation to *decision-making.*

First and foremost, the central theme of the findings in this chapter is that pupils from England and Norway experience upper secondary in very different ways. On the whole, Norwegians appear to be less satisfied with their experiences and tend to approach the education system from a passive role in which the system impinges upon them. Whilst they tended to respond positively to many of the items, particularly those concerned with *choice*, there remained significant differences between the Norwegian and English pupils suggesting that the extent of satisfaction is limited. English pupils who, whilst not always happy with the system, approached it from a more objective and evaluative stance and seemed better prepared, or at least practised, in making decisions about their future. The English were, however, less likely to perceive the upper secondary phase of education as part of a continual process of education, but instead made active decisions about whether to stay or leave, and how they would view it in terms of its contribution to their needs.

In terms of the influence of background factors upon pupil experiences, *gender* and *ethnicity* were found to have a bearing upon some question items. *Ethnicity* seemed to be a greater concern within the Norwegian sample with definite demographic patterns apparent, and with a sense of dissatisfaction with the system within the question item responses. Within Norway, also, female pupils seemed to feel more pressure in the decision-making process than their male counterparts. The *subjects studied* were an important influence for both the English and Norwegian samples but for different reasons.

Whilst a fuller discussion is given in Chapter Seven it is worth considering how one might explain such differential findings. Consider first the English educational system - students receive external examinations from an early age; they are required to make choices about their education from the age of 14; and, with no national history of 'staying on' but government initiatives currently encouraging this, there is much emphasis within schools about making a decision about the future. This very overt system of decision-making is reinforced with the need for specific grades and very

often personal interviews before moving into upper secondary education. In Norway, students receive almost entirely internal exams until they reach upper secondary education and, with everyone expected to move into upper secondary education, the decision-making process is streamlined in such a way that few students view it as a 'choice'. Selection of courses and schools is made based upon a council prospectus and pupils are informed about their success in being allocated to their chosen course and institution by telephoning an automated service. All students follow an obligatory first year (*grunnkurs*) before making choices about 50% of their curriculum in their second and third years.

It would seem from the results that what is important to students is *active choice* rather than choice per se. What does it mean to a student who can attend any school within the city that they wish to if they have not been supported and informed about all their choices beforehand? What does it mean to the student who can study any subject they want to if they are pressured to make certain decisions by their parents? What does it matter to the student who chooses to study an academic course in order to keep their options open if no one told them they were likely to fail the course? This point is clearly made in thinking about the Norwegian students (approximately a fifth of them) who only stay because there is nothing else for them to do. It is difficult to give *all* students options, but it is clearly not enough to simply provide *opportunity*. All students have the right to x many years of education but unless they are aware of exactly what those years are going to mean to them at an early enough age that they can do something about it then opportunity means very little. Keeping one's options open may not actually mean 'to delay decision-making'.

The immediate and most obvious dilemma apparent here is that giving pupils a choice that really means something to them and which will make them more satisfied with their education, may actually mean acknowledging that not all students are suited to upper secondary education. Questions arise then, not only about what other opportunities should be available, but also whether this is acceptable given the need for an educated workforce. Is it possible to give students an *active choice* without compromising the needs of society?

Chapter Six - Phase II - Interview data

A key aim in this research project has been to provide an opportunity for young people in upper secondary education to express their views and experiences of the processes of decision-making that fundamentally impact upon their future lives. This chapter represents the main body of data which constitutes the views of those young people. It is also supported by a series of 18 vignettes representing the decision-making process of a selection of pupils (Appendix 14) and the follow-up results of Phase III of the study (Appendix 15). Some illustrative excerpts from these vignettes are included within this chapter, along with quotations from other pupils. Pseudonyms are used at all times.

Within the English and Norwegian sections the emergent themes are *individual decision-making, support systems, equality of access* and the *school context*. Before discussing these, however, the chapter begins with an introduction of the data and definitions of the types of decision-making pupils were involved in (6.1).

6.1 Introduction

Those pupils who were interviewed were derived from a larger sample that had completed the questionnaires in Phase I of the study. Having selected a range of institutions to try and reflect what could reasonably be considered 'typical' of upper secondary education in both Oslo and Bristol, a range of pupils from each institution were chosen for interview. The criteria for each were gender, socio-economic status, the nature of the courses being studied, ethnicity and nationality, and any other factor which made a pupil typical or atypical of the group which had completed the questionnaires. Selection was, therefore, confined first by the context of the institution, and second, by the pupils grouping within an institution. This was, most often, in terms of their tutorial group or a particular course of study.

The data contributed towards answering all four research questions:-

1. What are the stated aims and purposes of policy in upper secondary education in England and Norway and how are these achieved?

2. What are the decision-making experiences of pupils in upper secondary education in England and Norway concerned with educational and career choices, and what are the major similarities and differences between the two countries?

3. How do factors such as gender, race and class affect the experiences of pupils in upper secondary education in England and Norway, particularly in relation to choice and access?

4. To what extent are *national educational policy*, its *implementation* and *pupils' perspectives* socio-cultural constructs, and what might be learnt from contextualising upper secondary education?

Findings

The findings, both within-country and comparative, have pointed to two overriding conclusions in relation to pupils' perspectives on *decision-making.* Firstly, pupils' perspectives are heavily influenced by the educational *context* within which they learn. This context is determined by the decisions which they make as a result of who they are as individuals and the selection process of the education system which affords them different opportunities. Their choices bring them together within particular contexts which, in turn, determine their outlook. The collective environment of those with similar perspectives serves to reinforce certain viewpoints which in turn guide the way in which pupils approach further possibilities.

The second finding is concerning the concept of *choice,* not as in an act of choosing, but as an opportunity. Genuine choice must be implemented if pupil satisfaction is to be maintained. If pupils are to focus positively upon their futures and what they can achieve, pupils must feel that they are actively choosing an educational pathway which best suits their needs. In order to do this, pupils must be prepared for decision-making, not only over a brief period of time immediately prior to making those choices, but over a longer period in which pupil awareness is gently cultivated. Pupils need to be conscious of their own abilities and preferences as well as understanding that instrumental gain of qualifications could be, at some point in their future, translated into job satisfaction, a comfortable income, and further educational possibilities. Furthermore, the system must provide them with realistic alternatives by acknowledging that choice does not only mean providing a range of possibilities. The system must take account of how pupils really make their choices and whether they believe certain choices are really available. Finally, the selection process which determines the criteria for certain opportunities must ensure that these criteria operate effectively for all pupils and is not viewed as a constraint by some.

In relating these findings to the English and Norwegian pupils, it would seem that there was a great deal in common in patterns of individual decision-making. Variations arose through the different opportunities afforded to the pupils rather than any differences in the way in which the young people approached the issue of choice. Similarly, school context was a key factor in predicting pupils' perspective and, although this was influenced by national trends, there was no straightforward link. Perhaps the greatest difference was in the way in which the pupils were

prepared for making choices. The English pupils appeared more experienced and, consequently, more opportunities were available to them than the Norwegians. In turn, levels of satisfaction were greater amongst the English pupils. Thus it was the involvement in making decisions which seemed crucial and how this transformed a list of possibilities into real opportunities. Furthermore, the Norwegian selection process was stricter than the English; had the Norwegians been better prepared for making their choices, this may not have been so problematic. The findings suggest that underpinning all the data, pupil *agency* is crucial if individuals are to move successfully through the educational system.

6.1.1 Defining Decision-making

In order to understand the decision-making processes involved within the various contexts and the choices open to the pupils, regardless of country, it was necessary to categorise these choices and decisions. In both countries, there were *four* types of choice to be made – whether to *stay on*, which *school* to attend, which *qualification* to choose, and which *subjects* to study. Clearly, these choices were applied very differently within the two countries but it remains that these were the central issues with which the pupils made their decisions. It should be noted that 'qualification' was interpreted slightly differently between the countries. Whilst in England this term referred to the nature of the examination being taken, in Norway this meant the line of study – academic or vocational.

To fully explore the nature of the decision-making process, all four choices were coded according to the type of decision that had been involved in making that choice; for example, whether proximity to home had been a factor in choosing which school to attend. In doing so, this provided a numerical count of the frequency of certain factors which influenced decision-making. In turn, this made it possible to identify trends within the data as a whole, and in particular, within each school and within each country. Such data cannot provide absolute figures of *all* influences given that it rests upon pupils' reports of what they felt were important factors, or what they chose to share. Nevertheless, there is value in such analysis as the descriptions and explanations given by the pupils were most often substantial and noting the frequency of such influences provided clarification of what might otherwise be difficult to grasp.

From the analyses, it was apparent that each of the four choices was guided by one or more of six factors, all of which emerged from the data. These have been categorised as follows:-

Figure 14 Typology of decision-making in upper secondary education

Restricted - Elimination of other possibilities, restricted opportunities, or lack of choice. Eg, "I never thought about not staying on", "A levels are what are on offer here", "I had to leave that school", "I didn't have any information about that".

Aspirational - Choice based upon future plans, aptitude or chances of achieving. Eg, "I need those subjects for my career plans", "I knew I could do well in those subjects".

Practical - Instrumental decision based upon practical circumstances. Eg, "I chose a school that was close to my home".

Coincidental – Experience which influences or changes the natural course of decision-making. Eg, "My subject choices were really influenced by the induction day", "Work experience really turned it around for me".

Social - Relationships which guide or influence choices, possibly a friend, teacher, parent, or social context. Eg, "My friends were staying on", "My mum wanted me to study maths", "My teacher really helped me to make my choices".

Preferential - Strong personal preference or interest. Eg, "I chose the subjects I am interested in", "This college offers a wide range of courses", "I wanted to go to this type of school".

Any single choice often involved a combination of these types of decision-making though some choices, and the decisions behind them, were more commonly linked than others. For example, preferential decision-making and choice of subject were a common combination. Patterns of decision-making could also be found within a given institution or even an individual who may have a particular approach to the choices they made. Furthermore, some types of decision-making were considered to be of greater value than others depending upon individual priorities. For example, aspirational decision-making was a priority for some whereas practical decision-making was a priority for others.

6.2 The Pupils

The pupils in this study came from a range of backgrounds and, equally, each pupil contributed their own unique perspective. They spoke of their families and friends, their relationships with

their teachers, their boyfriends or girlfriends, and their interests. Many enjoyed sports – swimming, handball, football, rugby. Others enjoyed music, dance, or theatre. Many of them had part-time jobs, be it because they needed the money, because they enjoyed it, or because they saw the value in it as an experience outside of school.

Through the interviews, the pupils were asked to reflect upon their experiences. They spoke of how they had developed whilst in upper secondary education – very many had become more confident more open-minded, they were better able to speak for themselves, they had become more responsible for their actions, or they had matured in their outlook. Most felt that the social environment had contributed to this since upper secondary schooling had given them the opportunity to meet new people; it had provided them with a platform to explore issues which may otherwise have not been possible. They also spoke of their future employment and how they believed upper secondary had contributed towards this. Employers would be looking for enthusiasm, confidence, motivation, creativity, as well as good grades, high attendance, and good behaviour. Simply being part of the educational process helped them to develop such skills and knowledge.

The English and Norwegian pupils, essentially, were presented with similar choices and experiences within a broadly similar environment, and as described above, in many respects they shared the same perspectives. However, there were some key differences which highlight both the need to protect *real* choice in young people's educational careers, and to fully grasp the impact of *context* upon a person's outlook. The findings which follow highlight these conclusions.

6.3 The Individual Context

Although it was not possible to characterise pupils according to their particular background as a means of predicting which choices they would make, it was possible to identify common reasons for making those choices. In addition, interviewees were asked to 'evaluate' their situation and their 'ambitions' for the future. In this way, it was possible to explore further their perspectives on the educational opportunities they had experienced.

6.3.1 Key Choices

The transition from lower secondary into upper secondary education occurs, in both England and Norway, when pupils are 16 years old. There are a number of key choices which are to be made at this point. For the English pupil this might involve deciding whether to continue their education in their school sixth form, to move to a college of further education, or some other institution. Once this decision has been made pupils must choose which subjects to study, how many, the level of

study, and whether to choose academic, vocational, or a combination of the two. In Norway, the first concern is to decide whether to follow an academic or vocational line of study. Once pupils have chosen which line of study they choose a school. At the end of Year 1 and Year 2 they will make choices about which optional courses they wish to pursue in the following academic year. Each of these choices is relayed in this section.

Staying On

Whilst all pupils in the study felt that they should continue their education, for the English this seemed to be a more *active* choice. In England, the decision was often about a rejection of the employment possibilities available at the age of 16 with very little reference to what one was 'supposed' to do. Monica from England, for example, said "I'd just come out of school, with hardly any, well, I had a few GCSEs and I was 16. There weren't really that many jobs open to me and the ones that were were so unchallenging, it was just really boring". This perspective is in contrast with the Norwegian pupils who, in many cases, stayed on because it was expected of them. Ingrid (Vignette 9), from Norway, said "It was not a choice for me to quit after doing the *ungdomsskolen*" whilst Karsten said, "Almost every people goes to *videregående*. All my friends wanted to go there and it's something you have to do I guess". Where pupils gave a fuller explanation of their reasoning, they also spoke of their future plans and the need to continue their studies as a means of optimising their chances for future employment or education. Tor explained, "Everybody goes to *videregående* in Norway if they have some ambitions to get a good job later".

Qualification

There was a difference between the two countries in the level of importance attached to choice of academic or vocational subjects. In Norway, this was often their first *perceived* choice. In choosing which of these, pupils were making a decision about their ability, their future aspirations, whether they wished to study in university, and to which schools they should apply. Speaking about the choice of the academic line over the vocational Einar said "*Yrkesfag* was a bit little ambitious for me so I chose *allmenn*". A further important point in Norway was the need to postpone one's choices and choosing the academic line allowed for this regardless of interest or ability. For those who had chosen the vocational line, most pupils had done so because they had a preference for that subject and intended to pursue a career in that area.

Very few of the English pupils referred to such choices – the distinction between academic and vocational courses, and the availability of qualifications and subjects within various institutions, were less clear. Pupils could choose to study a combination of the two if they wished, and although academic and vocational courses might have differential status, it did not affect the possibility of studying in higher education. Furthermore, choice of qualification was often restricted by choice of subject or choice of institution. Jeremy said, "I think it's basically, just AS and A levels are the only

ones offered to us really". Furthermore, many pupils felt comfortable choosing to study A levels, a qualification they were familiar with. Choice of qualification was secondary to other choices, therefore, and did not impact upon the English pupil's future to the same extent as the Norwegians. Consequently, this option was given less importance in the interviews.

School

For the Norwegians, the choice of school was particularly important. In Oslo, there were over 20 schools to choose from, some offering academic courses, other vocational, and some both. It was often a combination of factors which influenced their decision, but the location of the school and its proximity to their home were key reasons for choosing it. Its reputation as a 'good' school was also important, particularly for those who were attending better schools. Other pupils had selected a school because it offered something which others did not; for example, the opportunity to study a new course or the opportunity to spend their second year of study in England. The following quotes from some of the Norwegian interviews illustrate the range of explanations given:-

Tor – It's one of the schools that you need pretty high grades for and so I think it was a good school and it's not far away from home.

Guri – This school, because it was closest and a lot of my friends was going to study here.

Arild – The students here seemed quite, it seemed like you could dress like you wanted and say, have the political opinions that you wanted. Very free in that way (Vignette 12).

Robinder – I wanted to go somewhere I didn't know anyone because I didn't want to spend any more time with them, want to be alone.... And the other thing was, that the second year you could go to England, but I didn't go to England.

Karsten – I live very nearby it, and it's the kind of, I know a lot of people that went here and I heard a lot about it. It was a very good school and my father, he went to the same school as the counsellor so they knew each other.

Katrine – It was the only school that had media when we started.

Tove – I just heard about that school, because it was near, and some of my friends went there and that's why and you know, there's a high grades and everybody wants to go there.

In England, pupils were concerned with the location of the school or what was familiar to them. Pupils who were in a school with a sixth form felt it was an easier option to 'stay on' since they would probably be with their friends, they knew the environment, they knew their teachers, and the school was often close to their home. William, for example, noted "It was just easier to come here cos I knew everyone" whilst Jacqueline (Vignette 4) suggested, "I wanted to stay on at sixth form because my friends were here, thought it was easier. To go to college, you know **Brookfield College**, in the centre of town is a long way and I was comfortable with all the teachers and everything". Pupils only tended to look elsewhere if they were dissatisfied with the possibilities available within their local context or if their particular school did not have a sixth form. For those applying to college, location was also an important factor and most often dictated which of the colleges they chose. Rachel (Vignette 6), for example, said, "I was only doing two (A levels) and my GCSE then so I thought, well, I'd have a lot of frees, so I'd rather be working and seeing as I

work in town I thought, well, college, like, this college is near town so it's a lot easier to tie it in like that".

Figure 15 Vignette 7 – *Katie* – Brookfield College (City campus) - England

Katie never felt that she fitted in with her class-mates in school. It was located in a deprived area and lots of the pupils were using drugs and stealing. She felt she should be doing the same but she didn't want to - she had an older boyfriend and wanted to spend time with him. She also wanted to be a solicitor and all her choices had been geared to this plan. She was offered an apprenticeship at a solicitor's office when she was 16 and so left school. Two months later, however, and she was questioning her aspirations. She found her work tedious and she disliked the attitude of the solicitor who "thought he was above everyone else". Katie could not imagine herself staying there for four years and, therefore, left.

Confused about her future, Katie spent a year working and thinking about what she would like to do. Working made her realise that she needed to continue her education and during that year she decided she would like to become a nurse – "I said to my boyfriend 'I want to become a nurse but I'm not brainy enough to go' because I didn't think, I thought, to be a nurse you'd had to have As in everything but I never looked into it. So he looked into it for me and applied to do the childcare course here. So that's how I done it basically and then I started this September and now going to uni in September". After that, Katie would like to train to become a midwife but needs the nursing qualification first. She described how she wants "to be part of the amazing experience of birth".

Katie spoke of her reason for studying at **Brookfield College**; it was a new building, a good location, and there was a direct bus route from her home. She also said that she had chosen to study the NNEB but at the interview she was told that her grades would be too high and that she should apply to study a BTEC National Diploma instead. She felt it was important to study such practically orientated courses because she wanted to make sure she was right in believing that she wanted to work with children. She also felt that work placements were what kept people on the course, that you learn more whilst on practise rather reading it all out of a book as with A levels. She was currently nannying for babies under one and felt spending two days a week with a baby was more useful than being told what to do by a lecturer.

Subjects

In Norway, whereas the choice of school was more important, perhaps because of the open competition for places, there were far fewer choices in terms of subjects with approximately 50% of curriculum time spent on obligatory courses. In England, subject choice was a greater concern. In both countries, interest and ability were key determinants of which subjects a pupil would choose. This is borne out by the comments of Claire and Dawn from England - "I decided on what I'd do because of what I thought I was good at in GCSE" (Claire); "I think it was because I enjoyed them because at that time I didn't know what I wanted to do. I think it was the subjects I thought was strongest at the time as well" (Dawn). In Norway, Trond explained, "I chose the subjects that I find interesting and think that I can get a good grade in". In the same way, Guri said, "Just what I like. I

don't know what I'm going to be yet but I'm going to study next year so I took the courses that I felt, that I thought I was going to do well in".

A substantial number of the pupils also chose their subjects on the basis of their future career plans. In England, this was, most often, the case for those who were studying at the colleges of further education. Pupils in the sixth forms did have career plans but these were less likely to be cited as the reason for their choices. Christopher, at **Eddington School** was the exception, "I'd always wanted to do medicine so all my options were chosen with that in mind, the sciences and the maths". Giving such a reason for choosing specific subjects did not appear to be related to whether a pupil was studying an academic or vocational course. That it was more common amongst pupils attending college may simply reflect the level of agency in those pupils. Finally, timetable restrictions often influenced at least one of the English pupils' choices.

6.3.2 Evaluation

Whilst pupils spent much time describing the choices which had been available and the decision-making process, they were also asked to extensively evaluate those experiences. Such questions included whether the pupil was happy with their choices, what they had gained from upper secondary education, whether they were able to describe a positive and negative educational experience, and if there was anything which could have made their experience in upper secondary school better. Some notable distinctions between the English and Norwegian pupils became apparent in doing so. Perhaps most importantly, it demonstrated how the context of the educational system impinges upon pupils' perspectives including levels of satisfaction, whether they feel happy or sad, their memory for events, and whether they perceive themselves as having any control over their lives.

There was a great deal of polarisation in the level of satisfaction within the Norwegian sample. A third of pupils were happy with their choices and a third not. Those who were not happy felt that their choices had been restricted in some way. Ingrid (Vignette 9), for example, described how she had been unable to study chemistry for two years which she needed for a career in medicine. She had moved from Bjørnstand *videregående skole*, one of the most reputable schools in Oslo, to ***Vannsjø videregående*** in the second year, hoping that chemistry could be one of her options. The course, however, was oversubscribed and priority was given to applicants who had attended the school in their first year. Although Ingrid was aware that this might happen she was still very disappointed. Further reasons given for pupil dissatisfaction with their choices included those who were forced to change school because their grades were poor, other pupils simply felt that there weren't the choices available for them. Rune, speaking about his course in Media and Communication at ***Sæther Videregående*** said, "I don't think I, I wouldn't have chosen another

school because I think this line, or what we call it, is the best for me but I don't think it's all so, these three years, no good for me but it was only, only thing I could do". Of the same school, Kari said, "I'm not happy but I'm satisfied. It's OK..... It's such a large and ugly school".

There were a third group of Norwegian pupils who had minor concerns. Often, their regret was in choosing a particular *subject* – it was no longer interesting to them or it proved to be more difficult than originally anticipated. Alexander (Vignette 10) said, "I found out with the information (technology) it's just plain boring. It wasn't what I thought it was going to be" whilst Wenche explained "I'm happy with my choices but if I should have chosen again now, if I have, for example, been working or something else, I might have chosen music as a direction instead" (of art). Interestingly, almost every English pupil complained about their subject choices, usually in relation to a better alternative.

When looking at the pupils' evaluations of how their experiences could be improved, the English pupils spoke of changes in a much broader sense whilst the Norwegian pupils were more pragmatic in their interpretation of the question. They considered only what could be changed and, perhaps, because they felt very little, again there were more negative responses. Furthermore, when the pupils spoke of what they had gained from upper secondary education, almost a fifth of the Norwegian pupils gave a negative answer compared with only 6% of the English pupils. The possibility to make active decisions and to feel that the constraints of the system are fair may be important elements in understanding such distinctions.

When pupils were asked if they were able to recall a positive or negative experience, some interesting comparative findings emerged from the pupils' responses. In both countries, the themes of *assessment* and an incident which might be described as *social* were predominant. The particular difference lay in the absence of *assessment* from the Norwegian pupils' descriptions of positive experiences. This, most likely, relates to the nature of the theme. A description of this and some examples of the pupils' views are presented below.

In England, exams were a significant concern for the pupils, particularly in the sense that their self-esteem rested upon success. Jo, for example, spoke of getting a result on her childcare course – "I think just getting a distinction which is the most you can get in, on the BTEC, and getting my first one of those, I was so 'oh my God', so happy". Stephen similarly spoke of attaining good grades,

> Getting my results last year really, after my first year here cos I, basically I got, in maths, cos I was really really surprised at this, it completely changed my view of it, I got 97% in it in the whole thing, and I just, I was really really surprised and then it made me think 'well, may be I could do this at university' which I hadn't even considered before.

Pupils also described how they had done less well at their exams than expected, or that they had experienced problems with exam-related work. Jacqueline (Vignette 4) described her most negative experience,

> My grades at mocks and I won't never forget them because I, I didn't work that hard and I thought 'oh, they're only mocks, I don't care' but then, when I got my grades back there was a couple of Es in there and that and compared to the people I hung around with who were my closest friends, they had done really well and I was really disappointed with myself and embarrassed.

Thus, the English pupils invested themselves in the exam process and accepted the result as a judgement of their ability.

In Norway, the pupils' concerns with *assessment* were more in relation to unfair grading or treatment by a teacher (see section 6.5.2). They often questioned how the assessment had been carried out, or were unhappy with the circumstances. Martin, for example, described how his teacher had denied losing his biology assignment and had threatened to fail him, whereas Wenche described how her teacher had given her class an assignment to enlarge a particular drawing by a factor of four, but this was later marked by a different teacher who penalised her for enlarging it so much.

In relation to the theme of *social* factors, negative concerns in both countries included bullying, relationships with other pupils, and relationships with teachers. For example, Louise (Vignette 18) from Norway recalled her time in *ungdomsskole* – "I came into junior high school as a confident girl and I ended up as this wreck with no, no self-esteem, nothing and I've used these three years to desperately try to build up what he, he tore down something you can never build up and I'll always hate him for that". More positively, and particularly in Norway, pupils focussed upon the impact of friendships. In recalling her most positive experience, Beatrice said, "That must be the beginning of ***Vannsjø videregående*** because there are so many great people in our class, got a lot of friends. We had so much fun together". Many of those who had spent their second year in *England* gave this as their most positive experience. For example, Ragnhild (Vignette 16) said, "I think England is my best thing. I changed, it was an experience being away from home".

Virtually all pupils in the project planned to study at university. Many of the English pupils had made choices about which subjects to pursue and had secured conditional offers to study at various institutions. Where pupils had contingency plans in the event of achieving lower grades than expected in their exams, this involved either re-sitting their exams and applying the following year, or applying for a university with a lower entrance requirement through the clearing process. Very few pupils felt they would be deterred should they fail their exams at the end of Year 13.

The Norwegian pupils were more open-minded in their approach to further studies. Almost without exception the pupils planned to study at university regardless of whether they were studying an academic or vocational subject. It is important to note that it was not possible to interview any students who had chosen vocational subjects *without* the option to gain entry into university. It was clear, however, that attending university was an important choice even if a pupil did not feel particularly academic in their approach to learning. It should also be remembered that choosing the academic line did not reflect ability only, but was perceived by all as a means of delaying choice. Most pupils discussed their future very openly with very few definite plans.

Many pupils in Norway were considering a 'gap year', the possibility of travelling abroad, or even studying abroad. Whether they were inclined towards such a plan was not a reflection of any prior experiences abroad, for example, in having family members living elsewhere or in having lived in England during their second year of study. They intended to take a break from their education and then, when the time was right, return to it. There was less of a sense of purpose amongst the Norwegians; the goal of a career seemed far off and the university experience was an end in itself. Very few had real contingency plans because it was not necessary. Most were confident that they would secure a place at some university even if they needed to re-sit some of their courses privately or to pursue top-up activities which would give them extra points in addition to those gained through upper secondary school and, therefore, a sufficient number to make a university application. Military service and Folk High School education were two activities which could contribute. Ragnar, for example, said

> I want to study journalism and media and I might. To do that I might have to have a couple of years of, of practical work, not practical work but, I have to be a couple of years in a job, like in a newspaper to study journalism because that gives extra points because I don't think I have, it's the hardest school to get in in all of Norway actually, the journalism school in Oslo so I might have to work a couple of years.

Interestingly, in spite of the apparently relaxed approach to their future plans, a good number of the pupils did fulfil their ambitions. Further analysis, however, suggests there may be issues related to such an approach (see Appendix 15).

6.3.3 Overview

The following table provides an overview of the findings relating to the *individual context*.

Table 42 Individual context: summary of findings

Topics/themes	ENGLAND	NORWAY
Individual decision-making ***Choosing to stay on***	Pupils stayed on because work was not an attractive option at the age of 16. Further studies were a means of improving work opportunities.	Few pupils referred to the decision to stay on. Those who did often felt it wasn't a choice because "everyone" did it. Others referred to the need to increase future career opportunities through further studies.
Choice of qualification	Pupils did not focus heavily upon choice of qualification. Decisions were restricted by choice of school and subject, beliefs about the status of academic and vocational qualifications, and familiarity with A levels. Pupils on vocational courses tended to choose a qualification that was best suited to their GCSE grades and future career plans.	Where pupils chose to study the academic subjects, they did so either because they were academically able or because they wished to safeguard future opportunities. Those choosing the vocational line did so because of a preference for a particular subject and with the intention of pursuing a career in that area.
Choice of school	Those attending lower secondary with a sixth form tended to remain there. Those without most often attended a college campus close to home. Some pupils who could have stayed at their school sixth form went to college because of course opportunities or because they were unhappy at their school.	Choice of school was the most important decision for pupils. Proximity to home, its reputations as a 'good' school, opportunities particular to a given school or because friends planned to attend it were all key factors in influencing pupil choice.
Choice of subjects	This was the pupil's main concern. Interest and ability were key determinants followed by career plans and timetable restrictions.	Pupils chose which optional subjects to choose based upon their interest, ability, and future aspirations.
Evaluation of choices	Pupils were generally happy with their choices but almost all had regrets about one of their subjects.	A third of pupils were happy with their choices, a third had regrets about a subject choice, and a third of pupils were dissatisfied because they felt their choices had been severely restricted.
Evaluation of gains	Pupils felt they had gained 'specific learning skills', 'social skills', and 'friendships'. 6% of pupils believed they had gained nothing or did not know what they had gained.	Pupils felt they had gained 'knowledge', 'specific learning skills', and 'personal development'. 17% claimed they had gained nothing or did not know what they had gained.
Positive experiences	Success in 'exams' was the main factor which pupils spoke of. 'Social' factors were also a dominant feature in their recollections.	Pupils spoke most positively about 'friendships'. They were also happy with their 'personal development' such as becoming more confident. A number

		of pupils spoke of 'school-related activities' and others referred to their time studying in 'England'.
Negative experiences	Pupils were most concerned with 'social' factors and failure in 'exams'. A quarter of pupils were unable to recall a negative experience.	Pupils were unhappy with 'unfair grading' and 'social' issues. A fifth of pupils were unable to recall a negative experience.
Evaluation of improvements	Pupils *wished* for better school/college 'facilities' or improved 'social' relations. Approximately 20% suggested there was nothing which could be done to improve their experience.	Pupils gave an extensive range of possibilities but were very *pragmatic* in their responses. A third of pupils did not believe their situation could be improved.
Advice to a younger pupil	Pupils advised others to be guided by their 'interests' in making their decisions, to 'stay on' in upper secondary school, to be careful in 'balancing their priorities', and to seek 'information' about which choices to make.	Pupils advised others to make their choices based upon their 'interests', or to spend time 'researching' themselves – what they liked, what they were good at, what they wanted to do in the future. They also suggested that a younger pupil should secure their 'opportunities for the future' by choosing to study academic subjects.
Ambitions	Pupils planned to attend university and most had chosen degree courses. Some had received conditional offers. Some pupils had contingency plans.	Pupils planned to attend university. Many planned to take a 'gap year' in order to travel abroad. Very few had contingency plans as this was not considered necessary.

Note: Percentages have been rounded up for ease of understanding.

6.4 Support Systems

The importance of support systems as both a source of information and for emotional guidance cannot be understated. Such support comes not only in terms of the process of decision-making offered within schools, but also in terms of the family and friends of the pupils, and their own personal reserves which may influence their whole approach to the education system, what they might gain from it, and the importance they attach to their choices. Support systems, therefore, underpin pupils' perspectives since the outcome of decision-making may rest upon the support received.

On the whole, English pupils responded favourably when asked about the support and advice they had received in making their choices. They were often able to list a range of factors even if some aspects of it were not entirely satisfactory. The Norwegian interviewees were surprised and unprepared when asked about the issue of support and advice when making their choices. The role

of friends was viewed as minimal, the role of the school acknowledged but not recognised as a significant factor, and parents apparently offered a mix of both direct support and more subtle influences in the form of expectations and values. It was the case that all pupils, English and Norwegian, only perceived support as such when they experienced it on an individual basis. The following section is categorised under the headings *school, parents, friends* and *covert influences.*

6.4.1 School

When speaking to the pupils about the support they received, the focus was upon their lower secondary school. A brief consideration of the nature of the support available within each country is necessary before discussing the views of the pupils.

In England, most schools provided careers lessons and a careers library which was resourced with computer programmes and brochures that could inform pupils about their future education or employment. The organisation, 'Connexions', usually visited to provide pupils with further information and to make pupils aware of the possibility of further support. Although the pupils often perceived Connexions as related to careers advice, it actually caters to all aspects of young people's lives and, in particular, seeks to identify those who may experience difficulties in planning for their future. Many of the pupils failed to recall any such visit. Although pupils would have been prepared in making their GCSE choices in Year 9, the real focus upon their future came in Year 11 when they were encouraged to think about their situation post-16. Some schools arranged interviews for pupils with the head of the sixth form to discuss specific plans. Pupils could also discuss their subject preferences with individual teachers and some schools arranged visits from representatives of the local colleges.

In Norway, at the end of their lower secondary schooling pupils receive a great deal of support and advice which should help to inform any choices they make about their future. There are a series of in-class sessions and a guidance counsellor makes a monthly visit to each class to discuss possible options. They are also available to the pupils at other times should they need individual advice. *Skoleetaten*, the central school board arranges a conference each year when all the upper secondary schools can present their courses. Four representatives also visit the schools in Oslo explaining the system to pupils and their parents. Upper secondary schools make contact with lower secondary schools to ensure that the guidance counsellors have information about their school available for pupils and, in addition, the upper secondary schools run open days when prospective students can visit. Furthermore, *Skoleetaten* produces an annual catalogue, *Kurstilbud videregående opplæring i Oslo* (Upper secondary courses on offer in Oslo) in which each upper secondary school has one or two pages to describe its programmes of study.

In England, support and advice was perceived as something over and above the general careers classes they had received; there were no individual sessions for those which did not raise concerns with school staff. Some pupils said that they had not been advised, only that the teachers had chatted with them to establish what their thoughts were and to confirm their choices. Perhaps, for this reason, pupils held no general consensus about whether or not they were satisfied with the support they had received. Many complained and yet many said they were very happy. Some knew what they wanted to do and did not feel they needed to seek further information. Some pupils felt that the focus upon encouraging pupils to stay on in the sixth form and then go to university dominated the support that was offered. Others recognised that this was simply a consequence of the school catering to the needs of the majority.

There was some indication that the needs of the institution determined the extent of the support which was provided. A school with a sixth form was often keen to ensure that its pupils stayed on rather than moving to another school or college. Pupils believed that information was available about alternatives but that they may have to be more active in finding that information for themselves than if they had chosen to stay on in the sixth form. They had not been *prevented* from receiving the information, neither had they been coerced into staying, only that the school had been keen for them to stay and this perspective had been transmitted to them. Likewise, the colleges were often very welcoming and arranged open days with the opportunity for potential students to meet the lecturers. Pupils were interviewed with a focus upon matching their qualifications and interests with the courses on offer.

In Norway, there was an overwhelming sense that the information they received was either insufficient in some respect or that it was not utilised as it should have been. Pupils were often surprised when asked about the support and advice they had received in making their decisions and frequently said that they had not received much help from the school. The two features which were most often recalled in terms of support were the availability of the guidance counsellor or *rådgiver* and the *catalogue*.

Again and again the interviewees gave a negative response about the information available to them from their teachers and whether there was a guidance counsellor if they had needed help. The vast majority of interviewees had not visited this person. Some pupils were proactive in that they had already made their decisions whilst others responded quite pragmatically – 'the resource was there, I didn't use it'. Some of those who had sought advice from the *rådgiver* or another teacher complained that the counsellor didn't have information about the different schools or that the counsellors and teachers only gave advice to those who wanted to leave school but otherwise those with good grades were not considered to need advice. Kathinka noted, "They gave advice for people who wanted to quit". The role of the counsellor was not always clear – was it someone who

helped you negotiate your options even if you do not know what you want to do, or was it someone that gives you factual information about which subjects are taught in which school or which job you could pursue with a given education? It would seem that the students were looking for someone to be more prescriptive in telling them which choices to make and were not prepared to have to do it for themselves.

The catalogue was the second most significant factor mentioned when asked about support. This is a source of information about which courses are on offer and other general facilities within the schools rather than a particularly overt opportunity for the schools to market themselves. Chanette (Vignette 15) complained about the paucity of the information provided, "We didn't get any information how the school was, just a little magazine where every school had written something about themselves". This may well be the case, particularly since it seems that many students rely on this alone for making choices about which school to attend and may, therefore, need a more elaborate source of information than the catalogue provides.

Figure 16 Vignette 17 – *Maria – Solfjell videregående skole*- Norway

Ringedal *ungdomsskole* had not been a good experience for Maria. There had been a lot of pressure about what clothes were worn and what grades were achieved. She felt that it was difficult to be an able pupil and was relieved that in her upper secondary school she was amongst other academic pupils. She had chosen to study the academic line because she did not have a career in mind which she could aim towards. Her goal was to keep her options open. She chose to study at ***Solfjell*** because she knew it was a good school. She wanted to be in an inspiring environment where it was acceptable to work at her education. It was also important to choose a school where she knew not many of her classmates at *ungdomsskole* would go.

Maria enjoyed Norwegian and RE in lower secondary, but "not the 'number' subjects". Therefore, her preferences didn't influence her choices in upper secondary. She chose the easier of the two maths options, biology, chemistry, English and French. She had made her choices because she felt that having a background in the sciences provided her with more options in the future. "Yes, because, especially maths and those kind of subjects because if you have, if you are going to get a good education there's, you almost, there's a lot of things you have to have been through..... I would never have chosen maths just because, because I don't like it but I think I have to because of later when I'm going to study".

Maria felt confused by the amount of choice available to her. She felt the number of possible combinations of subjects were misleading because, ultimately, certain combinations were necessary for your future education. She felt she lacked this knowledge and, therefore, did not know if she had made the right choices. Also, it was difficult for her to seek advice because she didn't really know what she wanted to study in the future anyway. A guidance counsellor in her *ungdomsskole* had told her, "'Oh, you have good grades, you can go wherever you want and do whatever you want'". Maria said, "That didn't help much".

Maria was very pleased that she had chosen to study biology but wished she had not chosen chemistry as she wasn't doing well in the subject. She didn't feel she was performing well in maths either which she had chosen in case she wanted to become a doctor or a vet. Now

she wasn't certain about such plans. Instead she was going to spend the following year at a *folkehøgskole*, studying about nature and the environment and topics such as how to prepare food outside. She knew she wanted more education at university or *høyskole* but she did not know what.

6.4.2 Parents

The nature of the 'support' provided by parents was generally good. For some it simply involved providing reassurance and giving their son or daughter the freedom to make their own choices without any real input from them as parents. For example, Chanette from Norway (Vignette 15) recalled, "My mum and dad supported me and everything"; "Do what you really want to". Parents were sometimes more active in helping their children seek the relevant information needed for making their choices or their sense of approval was more overt in specifying what would be a good or a bad decision. Einar said "I can't recall that they gave me any tips or *sånn*, such. My parents just said 'You shouldn't go to the *yrkesfag* and I totally agreed with them". Some Norwegian parents dissuaded their children from studying the vocational line.

For the vast majority, parents in both countries, and mothers in particular, took an active but reassuring role in the decision-making process. The following are examples of English pupils' comments about their parents' support:-

Marie – My mum, she just said, helped me, pushed me in the right direction.
Christopher – They knew what I wanted to do all along and so they just made sure I knew about the subjects that I needed.
Rachel – She said, 'Brookfield College is near town'. We came and had a look at it (Vignette 6).
David – She, sort of, well sometimes I don't understand everything and she'll just explain what they're trying to say.

In Norway, where parents were from a 'non-Norwegian' background there were definite issues raised. It proved problematic for them to advise their children when they had little knowledge or understanding of the Norwegian educational system. Alexander (Vignette 10) recalled, "I think I forgot to tell them. I just told them I was going to a new school....My parents don't know the system, they're not from this country". In turn, this made the pupils dependent upon the school, and in particular the *rådgiver*, to support their decision-making. Parents from ethnic minority backgrounds some times had different expectations of their children's education, perhaps wanting more to compensate for the lack of opportunities they had received in their home country. Ming Yee's (Vignette 11) parents expected her to follow an academic path although she believed it would have been possible to go against their wishes if she had really wanted to – "They say that if you think, think for yourself. It's your choice".

Another aspect of parental support rests with the extent to which they convey the importance of education. This may not be as explicit as providing help with decision-making but may simply be a reflection of parental expectations or experience within the educational system.

Figure 17 Vignette 3 – *Harry* – Stepleigh School - England

Harry's mum wanted him to go to university because no else in the family had ever done it whilst his father wanted him to be in a sound financial position whatever employment that might mean. A lot of his friends had left school at 16 to find work and yet Harry never thought about leaving school. He spoke of his brothers – "I just knew it was important really….. two of them are in jobs they don't really enjoy and the other one is unemployed so I always had a guideline of what not to do cos I knew what was going to happen if I didn't do it". He described how he wanted to wake up everyday and go to a job he enjoyed rather than struggling with a job he didn't like as he had seen his parents do. He says, "I'm going to be somebody". Needing five Cs at GCSE in order to stay on in the sixth form became crucial in motivating Harry as his goal became to secure a place at university.

Harry decided to stay on at **Stepleigh**; he knew the teachers and they knew him. He also said, in hindsight, "I wouldn't have been going to university if I'd gone to college cos I just wouldn't have had that drive". Staying at **Stepleigh,** however, did mean that many of his subject choices were restricted. He said,

> A lot of my lessons was dictated by the timetable cos looking back I wouldn't have did photography if I could have did another, if I could have did media but cos it was in, cos of the timetable it's got to be a different categories so in a way I felt like I was forced into doing it. And it wasn't made clear enough that whatever I do at AS is really really affect my university choices like points and all that and none of that was really made clear. All they said was do something you enjoy but I, to be honest with you, I wish I could have had more freedom with what I could do. If I'd did media as well I'd been here, at Oakwood, Newnham, and like, moving around, all the time, but I didn't want to go to college cos it's like starting anew isn't it?

In the end, Harry chose to study A level photography and English, AS sports studies in Year 12, AS media studies in Year 13, and a maths GCSE re-sit. The sports studies course was at Oakwood School and the photography was at the **Wolfson campus** of **Brookfield college.** Harry noted that **Stepleigh** was no longer the base it had been at the beginning because his courses were split between the different institutions in the Stepwood Partnership and also because his closest friends had now left. Even now, he says that there is a lot of pressure on him from friends who are working and do not understand why he remains in school.

6.4.3 Friends

Friends were clearly an important aspect of the pupil's education. When asked what they most enjoyed about their lower secondary education, the vast majority of pupils spoke of their friends or the social aspect of school – relationships with pupils or teachers, extra curricula activities, or the general atmosphere. It is not surprising, therefore, that friends should also feature in the support

network for making decisions about upper secondary education. In both countries, however, friends were supportive but not a crucial factor in deciding where or what to study.

A direct and obvious source of information came from older friends who were already in upper secondary education. In Norway, such friends served to create a perspective that directed the interviewees' expectations of what lay ahead of them. From this, many had the impression that upper secondary would be much like lower secondary education, a little more difficult, a little more homework, but essentially the same. Some felt they would be "very small" in comparison to their older friends or the friends of older siblings, some had heard terrible rumours, and many were surprised that the work was not more difficult than they had anticipated. There was, however, no sense that any of this information had guided any of the decisions they had made. In England, very few of the pupils had developed their impressions of sixth form or college from older friends. Instead, they relied more upon direct contact with the institution. Many pupils felt that friends were an unreliable source of information in this respect.

Friends were also able to provide pupils with an arena for discussing choices. In England, pupils spoke of how they discussed their options before finalising their plans and how helpful this had been in making decisions whilst in Norway they referred to whether their friends thought a particular choice of course was "cool", whether a particular line of education was valued, or even whether they were amongst a competitive group of friends who wanted to succeed in the education system and beyond. In much the same way as the dichotomy between support and influence with parental expectations, it is possible that friendships also played a hidden and unconscious role in the choices that pupils made.

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Finally, some friends influenced pupils through their own choices. Pupils were, however, reluctant to recognise this as a dominant factor in their decision-making. In fact, in Norway, the interviewees repetitively said 'friends were no influence' or 'friends supported me but we all wanted to do different things'. This may be the case given that all pupils must leave their lower secondary school and begin in a new upper secondary school. In England, the possibility of staying on in the school's sixth form had very obvious implications with regard to the influence of friends. Those who stayed on in their sixth form were most likely to cite it as important but for those who studied at a college they had often made the decision to move away from friends even if it were tempting to stay at school with them. Stephen said, "It's very very tempting to stay on at my old school just cos of friends. I decided not to in the end". Gareth noted, "We'd talk it over, 'what are you going to do next year?' and where other people were going was a factor but I wouldn't say that people decided *en masse* to go to one place with each other. It was just that if two or three people happened to be going to a place, that might influence your decision".

6.4.4 Covert Influences

The support described above was essentially overt. The pupils, however, were also prepared for their decision-making in a more subtle way. Cultural and educational traditions may be important in creating pupils' understanding of their role in the system. For example, in England, the cultural ethos regarding the purpose of education, the nature of assessment, duration of studies and the narrowing down of opportunities with time all appeared to act as a covert influence upon decision-making. Many of the pupils had developed a sense of the importance of education through the frequent and very formal assessment process in which they had participated from a young age. They understood that gaining a good education was instrumental in securing future employment. They also understood that the structure of the education system meant that their choices would be restricted as they moved through the system, beginning with their GCSE options. This meant that it was important to think about those choices from an early age. Finally, they understood that their university education was pending and this created a sense of urgency and the need to think about the future. This perspective was passed to the pupils through parents, teachers and experience of the system itself. Collectively, they created a mode of thinking amongst the pupils which acted as a resource for making their choices.

The Norwegian system hopes to provide all pupils with equal opportunities. All pupils are entitled to a full and comprehensive education until they are 19 years old. The educational system is designed in such a way that pupils should have equal opportunity to attend a school and course of their choice. A primary focus is upon social relations and equity in the classroom. All pupils work from the same texts books although teachers are required to differentiate according to the needs of the pupils. Pupils are encouraged to pursue a lengthy education with the vast majority continuing their education beyond 16 and very many aspiring to university. It is not uncommon for university students to continue their education until they are in their late 20s. Pupils are encouraged to keep their options open for as long as possible evidenced by the broad curriculum which pupils follow until the end of their upper secondary education. It is possible, that this cultural perspective of education has created a mode of thinking which does not support decision-making. Pupils are not aware of the transition from lower to upper secondary education; they do not seem to think of education in terms of a pathway with an ultimate goal.

A related factor was the extent to which the pupils valued their education from an early age and the extent to which such a belief had provided them with opportunities. By viewing education as important from an early age, pupils would be able to work towards their choices, to explore their interests and preferences, and to develop goals. Essentially, understanding the purpose of education would give them a pathway.

The pupils were asked whether they had valued their education whilst they were in lower secondary school. Pupil responses were initially categorised as 'Yes' or 'No'. The 'No category' comprised of a range of answers from those who felt antipathy towards their education and who had only come to recognise its value in recent months to those who questioned the whole purpose of education from a more philosophical stance. Most often, however, these pupils simply had not realised the importance of a good education as a means of securing their future. Those who formed the 'Yes category' all showed a commitment to their education from an early age. Pupils' positive responses could be further divided according to the reasons they gave. For the English pupils (77%), there were three answers – (i) parental values, (ii) aspirations for the future, and (iii) assessment. Thus, their value of education was founded upon *intrinsic, instrumental* and *external pressures.* For the Norwegian pupils (56%), the division was simply between parental values and aspirations for the future. Interestingly, assessment played no role in their understanding of education.

Table 43 below shows the relative percentages of the influences on pupil attitudes towards the value of education in England and Norway.

Table 43 Influences on pupil attitudes towards the value of education (a)

	Yes (%)			No (%)	TOTAL
	Parents	**Aspirations**	**Exams**		
England	25.81	38.71	12.9	22.58	31
Norway	30.56	25.0	0	44.44	36*

* Data was unavailable for one of the Norwegian pupils.

Parental values were fairly comparable in instilling such values in their children. The main differences lay with the focus on a future education or career (aspirations) and the examinations process. The English pupils felt that the choices they were making now were directly related to the future whereas the Norwegian pupils made decisions in order to postpone their real decision-making to the future. Ironically, this open-ended structure to the system restricted the pupils by failing to equip them with the skills they need to make choices.

To further explore the data, consider only those pupils who claimed to value their education (see table 44).

Table 44 Influences on pupil attitudes towards the value of education (b)

	Yes (%)			TOTAL
	Parents	**Aspirations**	**Exams**	
England	33.33	50.0	16.67	24
Norway	55.0	45.0	0	20

In England, *of those who had realised education was important*, a third had derived such values from their parents, half from their aspirations, and 16.67% as a result of the examinations process. Parental input, therefore, was less important than that which the pupils gain from the educational system. This compares with the Norwegian pupils, where approximately half of pupils values were derived from their parents, and half from their future aspirations, but none as a result of the assessment process. This data suggests that within the Norwegian sample, Norwegian parents are more likely to instil the value of education in their children than English parents, perhaps because they have more knowledge of the upper secondary process through their own experiences (see Appendix 11). This is set against the earlier finding that a mother's support is particularly important and that, within the Norwegian sample, there are issues for some pupils that make this problematic.

Other background factors were also explored. It would seem that the female pupils were more likely than the male pupils to believe that their education was important from an early age.

Table 45 Influences of *gender* upon pupil attitudes towards the value of education

	Yes (%)	No (%)	TOTAL
Male	58.33	41.67	24
Female	69.77	30.23	43*

* Data was unavailable for one of the female pupils.

A further issue is that of ethnicity and nationality and its impact upon the educational system. There were an insufficient number of such pupils within the English sample to make a comparative analysis. Within the Norwegian sample, however, there were 14 pupils who were categorised as 'non-Norwegian'. It would seem from the data that pupils from such a background were less likely to claim that they valued their education compared with the Norwegian pupils.

Table 46 Influence of *nationality* upon pupil attitudes towards the value of education

	Yes (%)	No (%)	TOTAL
Norwegian	68.18	31.82	22*
Non-Norwegian	42.86	57.14	14

* Data was unavailable for one of the Norwegian pupils.

It is possible to suggest that pupils from ethnic-minority backgrounds or other cultures do not have the parental support they might need in order to succeed within the educational system. This argument has some merit since parental knowledge of and experience in the educational system can be an important resource for young people. Language may also be a consideration since it may not be possible for parents to participate in meetings with teachers, school activities, and helping their

child with their homework. The pupils own language abilities may also be a hindrance since they may not grasp concepts as successfully as if they were a native-speaker. Social issues and the reasons for being immigrants within Norway may all be contributory factors.

Interpretations of the data can be problematic when grouping a whole range of circumstances within a single category. This is best illustrated when considering the experiences of Roshan from Iran and Filip from Denmark, both living in Norway. Roshan has always believed in her education because her mother appreciated that the opportunities available within Norway were greater than those in Iran. She wanted Roshan to take advantage of such possibilities. Filip, however, had been told many times that his education was important but he failed to listen. Individual differences, therefore, are likely to be evident within the sample.

A range of other factors might also impact upon an individual – whether they have older siblings and their educational choices, whether their parents have received an education and the nature of their employment. Pupils may also be influenced by disruption in the family such as divorce, or older siblings moving out. Pupils may have had to attend several schools, or they might have been adversely affected by a period of bullying. All such factors have been raised by the pupils and all impacted upon their experience of education and the extent to which they could invest themselves in it.

Figure 18 Vignette 11 - *Ming Yee – Vannsjø videregående skole* - Norway

Ming Yee lived with her Chinese parents and one of her sisters. Her mother was a seamstress with her own clothes shop, her father a cook. They had moved to Norway some years previously and neither of them had an upper secondary education. Ming Yee had one older sister who was physically disabled and two younger sisters. She was the only one to study in *videregående skole*. She worked hard to get good grades as she saw this as the only way to secure future opportunities. In addition to her school work she worked, reluctantly, at her mother's shop.

Ming Yee described how she had always valued education; it was something her parents had instilled in her. In fact, she knew that she had to study at *videregående skole* because her parents would have been very unhappy if she had chosen any other alternative. They wanted her to have an academic career and consequently she was planning to become a dentist. She knew she would have to study at university and that, largely as a result of the competition for places, she knew the entrance requirement was high. In order to achieve this goal she chose maths, physics and chemistry as her *studieretning* for two years. She said that she had always hated maths and the sciences and thought very much about the arts but her parents did not support this option and now, she too felt it was a better choice because one could not go far with a job in the arts. She described how sad she felt because she didn't enjoy her subjects since she wasn't doing well in them. She also suggested that she would have to make herself enjoy them because she was going to be applying her subject choices to her career for the rest of her life. In giving advice to others about making their choices Ming Yee said, "First I would tell them that they have to choose thing they are interested in and they like to do it because this is a thing you have to do the rest of your life

and, yes, you achieve them better when you do thing you like and not because of anybody else say it".

Ming Yee made her choices about which school to attend at the end of *ungdomsskole*. She did not receive much support and felt that the only information she was given was a catalogue with all the schools and their grades. She considered ***Vannsjø*** first and attended it for the first two months of the first year. She was put off by the ugly building and instead chose Oksen *videregående* because her best friend also studied there. However, she found it difficult to travel an hour each way, and also felt isolated because there were very few pupils from ethnic minorities there. At the end of her first year she changed back to ***Vannsjø***.

When asked if she was happy with her choices, Ming Yee said that yes, she was happy but she was also sad that she was doing so poorly in so many of her subjects. She believed she would get a 4.7 or a 4.8 but she needed a 5.0. She said that she would have to take top-up courses at the science faculty at university in order to support her application because she would have an insufficient number of points to apply for dentistry based upon her upper secondary qualification alone. This would mean that her education could be delayed by two or three years.

Ming Yee had no positive experience which she wished to re-tell, but she spoke much about the pressures of being in school and how depressed she had been throughout. She had received help from the school guidance counsellor and from the county Educational and Psychological Services. She had received counselling for over a year but did not feel it had helped her. Instead, she now felt that she had to deal with it on her own and had stopped attending the sessions. She had kept studying throughout but had often been very close to dropping out. She felt her parents would be very shocked if they had known about this and how serious her depression had become.

6.4.5 Overview

The following table provides an overview of the findings relating to *support systems*.

Table 47 Support systems - summary of findings

Topics/themes	ENGLAND	NORWAY
Support Systems	Pupils were generally positive about the support they had received.	Pupils were generally negative about the support they had received.
School	There was no consensus amongst the pupils as to whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the support provided by the school. Pupils were able to recall a range of activities but did not recognise it as support unless it had been provided on an individual basis. Many pupils forgot the support received by the organisation, Connexions.	The main sources of support were the school counsellor or *rådgiver* and the catalogue. Pupils were generally dissatisfied with these. Furthermore, they did not recognise support unless it had been provided on an individual basis.

Parents	Mothers were the most supportive. There had been much direct support with assistance in making choices and finding information. Parents were generally reassuring.	Mothers were the most supportive. Most were active in assisting their children and/or reassuring them. Some were prescriptive in dissuading their children from studying the vocational line. There were problems for pupils of a non-Norwegian background.
Friends	Friends discussed choices with pupils. Pupils some times made the same choices as their friends. Some, though not many, had received information from older friends and siblings.	Older friends had been useful in providing pupils with information about upper secondary education. Friends had also been supportive for discussions about choices. Pupils had not deliberately made the same choices as their friends.
Values	77% of pupils had valued their education from an early age whereas 23% had not valued their education until the end of lower secondary education or later. Three factors led to the development of such values - *parental values, future aspirations* and *the examinations* process.	56% of pupils had valued their education from an early age whereas 44% had not done so until later in their schooling. Two factors led to the development of such values - *parental values* and *future aspirations*

Note: Percentages have been rounded up for ease of understanding.

6.5 Equality of Access

Although this theme emerged in both interviews with the English pupils and with the Norwegians, it was presented in very different ways. In fact, it is more the nature of the pupils' responses which is of interest comparatively, rather than the subject-matter. This phenomenon is discussed later, but it seems pertinent first, to address the specific issues raised by the pupils. These are presented separately given the lack of consensus within the theme.

6.5.1 England

Pupils most often raised concerns about equality when asked whether the pupils thought there was anything particularly fair or unfair about the educational system.

Pupils felt that the system favoured more academic individuals. Pupils who were less able often received the worst teachers or their teachers only focussed upon the better behaved pupils. Harry (Vignette 3) said that he understood that schools did not want to waste good teachers on those who did not wish to learn, but he felt that they often missed eager pupils. He suggested that they could

be encouraged by giving them real incentives such as demonstrating the importance of a good education in terms of salary and what could be purchased with different levels of income. Katie (Vignette 7) felt that behaviour was a problematic issue. She felt that teachers should spend more time helping pupils to learn rather than focusing upon punishment and reward. Fiona noted,

> As I've experienced it, no, I think through my life, it's been quite fine but for other people, like, I've always been somebody who gets on with their work and everything and so I get treated really well by the teachers and so I don't talk but I know that other people who aren't as well-behaved often, they get forgotten. Once you get behind in your work you don't get helped again. That's it. You're basically in the bottom group and that's it so you don't get out of it.

Less able pupils were believed to be penalised as a result of assessment by exams and through strict entry requirements into upper secondary or university education. Some of the pupils felt that the exam as a means of assessment was problematic since performance on the day need not reflect true ability for a subject area. Peter noted that it was crucial to succeed in GCSE exams if one was to have future opportunities. He suggested that the need to be 'academic' is restrictive because it prevents many pupils from studying at university. Richard felt that there should not be an entry requirement for upper secondary education so that all pupils have a choice. Claire suggested that not only were less academic pupils penalised by the system but she felt that the more able were automatically propelled through it. She also felt that there were better opportunities for those who came from an educated background where their parents may be better placed for encouraging them. Some pupils felt that the system did not cater sufficiently to those who might be better placed in vocational areas of study and that schools did not offer enough support to those who should choose an alternative route to the desired lower secondary - upper secondary - university pathway. Andrew (Vignette 5) from **Hipford College** spoke of the support for those who would be better channelled into a less academic environment. He said, "We have to, good human resources in this country, brilliant resources. We've got some really clever people, got lots of people in IT now but we haven't got many plumbers or builders and I think more should be done to equal out the gap". Others noted how universities were more eager to offer places to academic students who had studied A levels rather than vocational subjects. Becky, studying a BTEC National Diploma, spoke of her frustrations in gaining a university place,

> I do think that too much emphasis is placed on the importance of A levels. I don't think that people, really, cos now I'm applying to university to do teaching, and it seems to me from people that I know that have got A levels, it's a lot easier to get into do teaching and other degrees with A levels than it is with the course, like the BTEC which I think is unfair because A level people have done three subjects which probably aren't even relevant, which might not even be relevant to teaching.

A fifth of the pupils spoke of the university loans; all of these pupils attended **Hipford College** or **Stepleigh Sixth Form**. They felt substantial debts would be an enormous burden for them and that

the only solution would be to live at home and study at a local university. Andrew (Vignette 5) at **Hipford** said that he knew his parents would pay for his university education but that he didn't feel he could ask them for such a large sum of money. He questioned whether a university education away from home was motive enough to take on such large debts. He also spoke of how difficult he found it to visualise a future salary that would allow him to pay off those debts, particularly if the housing market continued to be problematic for first time buyers. Louisa, too, had thought about moving away from home for her university education. She had wanted to apply to Birmingham. "Originally I was considering, sort of, going to university, not local, cos then it means I have to deal with my finances, but now I just realise I can't afford it". She estimated that she would need £300 per month – "I wouldn't have the time to be be able to work those hours to afford that". Other pupils viewed the debts, not only as a deterrent from moving away from home, but as a deterrent from a university education. Monica and Andrew (Vignette 5) both spoke of this. Andrew said, "The debts are a bit daunting".

Finally, what was particularly interesting was that very few of the pupils complained about the volume of assessment required of them. Any such comments were often raised in relation to whether or not they had realised the value of their education from an early age rather than in terms of fairness within the educational system. Where they did raise it as an issue was in terms of the performance of less able pupils.

6.5.2 Norway

The Norwegian pupils felt very strongly about the issue of equality of access through a selection process. Approximately half the pupils raised their concerns when asked 'Is there anything particularly fair or unfair about the educational system?' For many, however, their concerns were raised through descriptions of their own experiences – why they had chosen a particular school, their most negative experience, how they felt their experience could be improved, and their plans for the future. Some pupils were dissatisfied whilst others described the circumstances without emotion; this was the system in which they operated. A minority felt it was a fair system since it encouraged and rewarded those who were prepared to work hard.

Choice of school and course

It is intended that all pupils receive equal access to the schools and courses of their choice. Opportunities are based upon the notion of the 'average grade' or *gjennomsnitt* from the previous year of study. As described in Chapter Four, pupils sit internally marked exams at the end of their lower secondary education and their average grade will determine which schools they can apply to. Entrance requirements to the schools are based upon demand and thus pupils with lower grades will

be forced to apply for the less popular schools since the most popular will already be fully subscribed with those pupils who have achieved the highest grades.

This system created a great deal of discontent amongst the students. Therese, for example, argued that it wasn't fair to test students by grades and restrict the type of school they could attend. Likewise, Joanne suggested it was not fair that those with a higher *gjennomsnitt* should have access to better schools. Martin said that he felt unhappy with the system because it created gaps in society between pupils, and Silje suggested that people can be clever in other areas, just not remembering things they had covered in their homework; the system should look more at the individual. Birgitte suggested that people often have skills which fall outside what is offered by school and those people are made to feel stupid. In fact, only *one* student explicitly said that she felt the system was fair – Kathinka commented,

> Everybody know that you have to work to get what you want so.... And if you don't have good enough grades you'll come into, not a bad school, but a school with, not as good students, and... I don't know. But everyone knows that from when you go to *ungdomsskole*. The last year we have to get good grades if you want to go where you want.

In looking at whether students felt their education was important, however, it was very clear that many did not realise its importance and its bearing upon their choices for the future until it was too late to influence their *gjennomsnitt*.

Some of the school representatives also commented upon this system of offering choice. Mikael Hansen from ***Blåfoss*** notes,

> You will find schools in Oslo who have 80 or 90% of students who actually didn't want to go to that school but who didn't have grades good enough to get into any of the others so we have a, you know, a system in Oslo with the good schools and the bad schools..... Basically you have the five down town schools, the four or five old grammar schools down town who have a lot of status and where, quite a few people want to go and there isn't room for everyone.....When it comes to those who don't really have specific problems the system doesn't really care very much about them because the students who don't have very good grades and perhaps should have been going to a local school to have their friends around them and everything, well they don't get into this school (***Blåfoss***) because so many want to go here and they are placed pretty far away from here because it is full up at ***Solfjell*** too. They are in the same position as we are and they are just placed at other schools around the city where they feel lonely, they don't have their friends around them and so on and I think the system works really bad for them.

Kjetil Johnson from ***Vannsjø***, however, suggested it was a fair system since it catered to the majority. He estimated that 85% of the population would be able to attend a school of their choice although he did concede that it created a system in which a minority of pupils did not have their

needs met thereby creating a system whereby three or four schools in Oslo might have only 20 or 30 pupils out of a total of 120 who actually wanted to be there.

> There will be pupils living around here I think, often minority language people, and because they have always problems with the Norwegian I think, and the subjects, and when they are refused here (***Vannsjø***) they often have to go to Dalen and Kristiandal, yes, 10 miles outside in the West or something and that's not so good but it's not so many pupils, but they exist.

Choice of school in Years 2 and 3

At the end of their second and third year pupils have the opportunity to change school if they wish to. For some this can be a very positive choice as they may be unhappy with their current experience and there were several individual cases of interviewees referring to such a change for social reasons. However, in one particular school there was a consistent message that such a change had been forced upon the pupils. There had been a lack of spaces and the pupils were forced to compete with other pupils based on their average grade in the previous academic year. The number of spaces available may be limited for specific reasons, for example, because pupils are returning after studying abroad for a year. In such a case pupils are given priority if they are returning to their original upper secondary school and, thereafter, pupils compete according to their grades. The potential difficulty with such a method was highlighted by the pupils of *Nesby* where most of the interviewees had changed schools at least once, and in some cases, twice. These were instances, however, in which their *gjennomsnitt* at the end of the year was too low. What this meant was that those pupils who experienced difficulty with their schooling from the start, were placed in more and more vulnerable situations, often further and further away from their homes, in schools which they did not want to attend but which they were forced to attend. Since virtually all pupils in Norway stay on in upper secondary education there is little choice for these pupils but to remain in the system as failures, perhaps re-sitting exams in the hope of achieving their final certificate (see section 4.4.2.2). For the school it can mean that by the third year of study they might have very few students attending who actually wish to be there as Kjetil Johnson described above.

Figure 19 Vignette 14 – *Olav – Nesby videregående skole* - Norway

> Olav loved art; he said he had no other interests. He said, "This was the only thing I could study and still want to go to school cos I'm not a fan of school". When he started in upper secondary he had really enjoyed a course in art history and as a result of this had decided that he would like to become an art teacher. He was, therefore, pleased that the art course included the academic subjects which would give him the opportunity to later study at university. Although he was frustrated at the number of compulsory subjects he had to study he viewed it pragmatically in the sense that he needed them in order to achieve his goal even if he wouldn't need them in his future daily life.

Olav's first choice of school was Blomstrud because it was close to where he lived. He didn't get in but, instead, was accepted at his second choice, Bordhandel *videregående*. He had been there two years and had had a good time, meeting lots of people. He did not secure a place there in his final year and thus, now, in his third year, he was at ***Nesby***.

Olav felt frustrated at the choices he had received. He felt that he had made the best of a bad job. He had been pleased with the art course to begin with but had felt that the people on his course were only there because they couldn't get onto any other course – "So then may be only one or two are really interested in that subject. The others take it because it's easy to get in. It's much easier than *allmenn*". He described friends who were studying music elsewhere and who had been auditioned before they were accepted onto the course. For his course, entry was based entirely on the *gjennomsnitt* and, therefore, the artistic talents of the group were limited.

Olav also felt devastated to discover, after having decided that he wanted to gain an education, that he was unable to keep up with the demands of his courses. "When I understood that I wanted to get an education, I want to get a job but I'm not able to. I don't.... I think I did a wrong choice when I started at *videregående* cos I'm not able to follow up what I should do to be in all the classes to get the grades to work at home". He was asked whether he had chosen the wrong course or whether he was not capable of attaining the grades. Olav replied, "I was not prepared to, what I was going into, how hard it would be, how it would be set up. I thought I had an imagination about how it was going to be. It didn't turn out that way so I was kind of surprised".

In hindsight Olav felt it would have been better to study art alone without the academic subjects even though this was not an option offered by the educational system. He was sad that if he failed at upper secondary school he would never be able to study art again because it would be impossible to repeat those three years. This meant that he would only be able to study it in higher education. It was imperative, therefore, that he pass all his academic courses and achieve his upper secondary qualification. He thought he would work for a year first, take a long holiday, travel, and then possibly take some art courses in the evening. He could also re-sit individual subjects and gain a secondary certificate in his academic courses. In this way, he might one day be able to study at university and become an art teacher.

16 months later – *Olav* had failed his Norwegian exams and, therefore, not passed his upper secondary certificate. Since leaving school he had been working in a television and kitchen equipment store whilst maintaining his interest in painting in his spare time. He still planned to train as an art teacher at university but could not do this for another year. Instead, he hoped to re-sit his Norwegian exams by registering with a private school just for the exam.

Choosing specialist subjects

When pupils come to select their specialist subjects in their second and third years of study, their average grade from the previous year is important. Allocation to places is offered to those pupils with the highest average. It does not take account of any particular talents a pupil might have in a specific subject. Mikael Hansen, school representative at ***Blåfoss***, said of this issue,

> To me, it's silly, it's strange. But actually, a student who has a 2, which is fairly low, in science during the first year and who shouldn't have physics at all who is pretty good in other subjects and has an (overall) average of about 4.2, alright, will be admitted to the physics class ahead of a student who has an (overall) average of 4.1 and a 6 in science. You see what I mean. So,.... It's very strange but actually, if.... Normally it isn't a problem at our school that people don't get the subjects they actually choose. It happens sometimes and the selection is actually made by average grades from the previous year.

A similar selection process occurs when students make an application to study at university. Arild (Vignette 12) questioned why his non-specialist obligatory subjects should play any part in gaining him a place at university when he intends to study one of his specialist subjects.

> I think that when I try to get into a new school (university) as this is my last year here, the thing is, if I get an A in maths and physics and information technology, as I'm studying. If I try to continue in studying something of the same kind, something I would need to know a lot about maths and physics, my gym grade would count and I don't really understand who came up with that idea.....

He went on to say that he accepted the value in studying additional subjects but did not accept that pupils needed to pass exams in many subjects which they might not be interested in. Furthermore, he discussed the possible consequences of this since if pupils did not pass all the subjects they would gain only a secondary diploma and would have to re-sit failed courses privately.

Assessment

Pupils are mainly internally assessed until they reach the end of their upper secondary schooling when they will receive external exams in Norwegian and one of their optional courses, and occasionally at the end of their first or second year of upper secondary. In general, however, until then, assessment rests with individual teachers. Many pupils were unhappy with this. Not only did it give teachers a great deal of autonomy but also introduced an element of subjectivity into the pupils' perceptions of a system that aimed to be objective and fair. This issue was explored extensively with both teachers and pupils alike since it emerged as a central theme in many of the interviews.

Using national guidelines, teachers spend much time verifying their marking to ensure they make an accurate assessment of a pupil's ability. In spite of this, the views of the pupils and school representatives suggest that standards fluctuate between schools. There was a sense of inequality and unfairness amongst the pupils who felt that it was easier to get a good grade in schools where the average pupil may be less able and thus the more able might outshine the rest. Tonje (Vignette 13) at ***Oppstrøm*** spoke of the possibility for a differential grading scheme between the schools in Oslo. "This school has had a bad reputation before so when students do a little bit better than the rest of the students at the school it's very, it's easier to get a better grade.... cos a serious student is rewarded because most other students aren't very serious".

The view that standards varied between schools was widespread and influenced the choices of some students when it came to deciding which school to attend. Elisabeth attended Bjørnstand in her first year. She went to England for her second year where she met a class of students from ***Oppstrøm***. Upon returning to Norway she decided to change schools to stay with the ***Oppstrøm*** group. She says, "When I came back I just decided to stay at this school because I believe it's a bit easier to get good grades here compared to the other school because it's really hard to get into the other school". She went on to explain how this happens in practice even though, in principle, it should not.

> If you can imagine a class where the skills within the class and within the school are not that high. If the students, they don't get good grades and if you then, if you're quite smart or if you do your home works, then the teachers, they give you something for your effort, more or less. But if you, for instance, if you go to Bjørnstand, you'll see all the students have quite a high academic level and they're, yeh, they have, a much bigger knowledge in everything, especially in subjects as Norwegian, and like, English and Spanish, and then the teacher, they don't give high grades out very often like here. They give them out to the few students who show themselves.

Two of the school representatives spoke of this difficulty as well. Marit Vestby from ***Oppstrøm*** said,

> This is very difficult. We try not to do it and the teachers, they work, in that respect, the teachers work together with other teachers, especially around exams, our *sensors*, they have courses. We try to use those *retningslinje* for marking throughout the year. But, I think it's a human thing that students with.....it's easier for us in this school, (to give) a student a higher mark. Yes, I'm afraid so.

Kristoffer Grefsen, head teacher at ***Solfjell*** also commented –

> You have guidelines and then you have to assess the pupils but if one or two are a bit better than the rest they will get the better marks, I think. If they get 3 or 4 here they will get a 5 in a neighbouring school.

Elisabeth at ***Oppstrøm*** had thought there would be a greater difference between the grading at ***Oppstrøm*** and her previous school. However, she suggested that because her new class was quite able it was not possible to get the higher grades she had first imagined. This would suggest that the problem lies not simply between schools, but possibly between classes. Elisabeth says, "I don't think the difference is that big actually. I thought it was supposed to be easier to get good grades but it's not because our class is quite good. There are quite a few good students there and they have quite good skills in all subjects".

A very obvious problem with this method of grading is that pupils may not be receiving fair grading and, given the system of selection based on grades, they may have their choices unfairly limited because an individual teacher has made an error in their grading. Louise (Vignette 18), a pupil at ***Solfjell***, observed the reverse of this problem. She spoke of her experience in teaching a first year class in upper secondary for a single lesson and the very obvious range of abilities in the class for

pupils who entered the school with the same average - "There's some (lower secondary) schools who actually give out good grades cos there are people now that could not have gotten those grades fairly". The suggestion was that some lower secondary schools give out their grades 'to be kind' to their pupils. This is not dissimilar to a point made by Mikael Hansen, school representative at ***Blåfoss***, who said that the first year of upper secondary is necessary even though it means covering a similar curriculum to that in lower secondary since not all students have the basic knowledge they need in order to study in upper secondary despite a high entry requirement due to the popularity of the school.

Given the importance of the *gjennomsnitt*, as described previously, it is perhaps not surprising that the issue of teacher autonomy over grading proved to be another central issue for the students. Of all their courses, whether obligatory or chosen, they are internally graded by their teachers. At the end of their upper secondary education pupils studying the General Studies course, that is, the academic line, are externally tested in three Norwegian exams (two written and one oral) and one of their specialisms. These are national exams as compared with those studying vocational courses which are tested at a county level. External grades are provided on each pupil's Testimony alongside their *standpunkt*, the grade given by their teacher. When questioned about the consequences if the internal and external grades did not correspond, Kristoffer Grefsen, head teacher at ***Solfjell***, said "It doesn't matter. We don't try to give the mark at the end of the year we think the student might get at the exam. We don't look at that at all. But most of them get better marks at the exam, in the same subjects at least. Especially in oral exams they score higher".

When questioned about the purpose of the external exams, if not to verify that teachers were grading their pupils correctly, Kristoffer suggested it was more about providing statistical information about standards on a national basis although obviously there would be something wrong if there were a great disparity between the grades and the teachers would discuss this should such a problem arise.

In addition to the grades for courses, pupils also receive a grade for their absence (*fravær*) and a grade for their general orderliness (*orden*). These were problematic for some pupils as they felt these restricted their independence as a pupil in upper secondary school and choices they might have about methods of learning. Arild (Vignette 12) complained that pupils can be penalised if they arrive late for a class, if they do not bring books for all classes, or if they behave badly in class. He suggested that it is a means of ensuring discipline but feels it is not the right way to achieve this, a viewpoint reiterated by Louise (Vignette 18) who said, "Anything they say is not going to make the slacker student do more. When you're 18 and you've chosen to be a slacker you're not going to, you know, change. May be at 12 and 15 you can do it, but not now".

Arild also suggested that many students should not be in the class anyway. He would have preferred to study by himself at home. The *orden* grade prevents this but ensures that there are many in class who do not wish to be there and who are, as a consequence, disruptive. Janne also complained about the fairness of this type of grading. She spoke of what she felt was unfair treatment in her first year of upper secondary. She had been reprimanded in class when it had been another girl who had been talking. Janne was sent out of class and given a bad *orden* score. She suggested that it was unfair that pupils can be away for 50 or 60 hours and still get a good behaviour grade whilst she, whose attendance was high, was given a bad score for a minor incident. Likewise, Robinder was concerned with the *orden* grade. He spoke of the "fascist behaviour of the school" since students were penalised if they were 10 minutes late for class and this was registered as being an hour late.

> They tell us they want to make us independent. That's not very independent. If someone wants, if someone comes late that's his fault but he really shouldn't be getting any punishment for that because, like, if he has his own responsibilities for his own education.

It emerged through further discussions that the use of the *orden* grade was very much at the discretion of the individual teacher.

Concluding Comment

For the English, their opinions were only given when directly questioned about the fairness of the educational system. Their main concern was the unfair deployment of resources in favour of more able pupils and the impact of university loans upon access to higher education. For the Norwegian pupils, however, many of the responses were given spontaneously so that by the time they were questioned about fairness within the system, they had said much of what they already wished to convey. This spontaneity seemed to be fuelled by their direct experience of injustices within the system. Thus even though the Norwegian pupils who participated in this study were at a level which would provide them with access to higher education, they were still likely to have encountered inequalities within the system. In England, more able pupils appeared to have less direct experience of these stresses, the exception to this being the possible restriction of choice for some as a result of university loans. It is unclear whether the differential findings reflect a fairer and more equal selection process within Norway, or whether the English focus upon an individualised curriculum has any bearing on levels of satisfaction. Of further interest would be the views of the least able or excluded in both countries.

6.6 The School Context

The earlier comparative analysis focused upon individual pupils' responses. From these it was possible to draw *national* conclusions based upon the collective perspectives of the many. It is

perhaps misleading, however, to rely entirely upon a clear distinction between the English and the Norwegian pupils. When pupil decision-making is examined within the context of their school patterns arise which are otherwise hidden by analysis of individuals. Pupils of similar ability, those with similar aspirations, those from a similar community, and so forth, may find themselves grouped together, and it is this which might also influence their perspectives and decision-making in addition to national trends; local contexts and other shared factors are equally important.

What emerges from the analysis of school context is that *pupil priorities* vary greatly according to the school in which they are studying. This would further suggest that the school simply acts as a means of creating a structure so that commonalities between pupils become more transparent. It would seem that it is *what goes on before the pupils begin upper secondary education and how they get there* which will, in fact, affect their choices and the decisions they go on to make. Once those similarities are brought together, however, pupil perspectives serve to nourish each other and magnify any initial outlook which pupils had before joining the school. This may explain why it was possible to sense an atmosphere when visiting the pupils. In some instances, there was a positive atmosphere and a real sense of purpose whereas in others it felt flat and drained. Some pupils were able to reflect upon their experiences with enthusiasm and to speak easily about their choices for the future whilst others were negative and passive. The following section provides a brief description of each school to highlight these differential contexts. In addition, Appendix 9, 'School Contexts', provides information concerning course options and researcher impressions, developed during visits to the schools.

6.6.1 School Vignettes

The four English institutions were **Eddington Sixth Form, Stepleigh Sixth Form,** and two colleges of further education, **Hipford College** and **City of Brookfield College (City campus** and **Wipton campus).** The six Norwegian institutions were ***Blåfoss, Vannsjø, Sæther, Nesby, Oppstrøm,*** and ***Solfjell.***

Eddington Sixth Form – Pupils were from more privileged backgrounds with firm family expectations for their future. The school, which focused almost entirely upon academic subjects, seemed well-resourced and pupils described a lively social environment and the opportunity to do well. In general, they had not looked elsewhere when deciding which school to study. Most pupils made a *social* decision, for example, to be with their friends or because of the positive atmosphere in the school. Some had also made an *aspirational* decision - they believed they could succeed in such an environment. Many had made a *restricted* decision in the sense that it was easier not to change. Their subject choices, on the whole, had been based upon a mix of interest, ability, career plans, and timetable restrictions. Support in decision-making had come from a combination of

friends, family, and school. Pupils were happy with their decisions except most would have preferred to change one of their subject choices.

Stepleigh Sixth Form – This school was one of six which created the Stepwood Partnership (see Appendix 9), thereby providing pupils with the opportunity the study at a number of different institutions with a variety of subject choices whilst also maintaining their original sixth form as their base. Pupils came from a less privileged background and there was not a tradition of upper secondary education followed by higher education as might be found in some schools. The school focused heavily upon overcoming this and encouraging as many pupils as possible to stay on and aim for a university education.

Pupils tended to stay on because friends, teachers or parents had wanted them to. When choosing which school to study at, **Stepleigh** pupils spoke of their friends, their teachers, and particular preferences they had for the school. However, 40% of the reasons given for their choice of school were *restricted*; the pupils were not encouraged to look elsewhere and they lived too far away from the main campuses of the two colleges of further education to seriously consider studying there. Subject choices were largely *aspirational* or *preferential*. The level of support they had received was mixed with some of the pupils not seeking or receiving exactly what they felt they needed. Most pupils described themselves as happy with their choices but complaints about subject choices and the school all focused upon a lack of information.

Hipford College – Pupils at this college had mainly chosen to continue their education because they saw it as instrumental in gaining better employment opportunities or because they had a specific career in mind. They had chosen **Hipford** for a whole range of reasons - it was a pleasant-looking and recently renovated building, often close to their home, and it offered the course they were looking for. Furthermore, for some pupils, other alternatives were precluded – their school did not have a sixth form, they wanted to meet new people, or there was no where else to study because, for some reason, they did not want to study at **Brookfield College**. When it came to making a decision about their subjects, pupils spoke of their interests, what they enjoyed and excelled in, but most importantly, how their choices were important for their future career plans. Pupils at **Hipford** had received support from various sources and there was no common trend. They were generally happy with their choices but most spoke of either being dissatisfied with one of their subjects or of dissatisfaction with some aspect of the college – a course that was poorly run or the college, itself, was disorganised.

City of Brookfield College – Pupils attending this college were largely focused upon their future careers; most described their reason for continuing their education in relation to future opportunities. The reasons for studying at the college were numerous with pupils citing friends,

course options, location, advice, lack of alternatives, and atmosphere as reasons for attending. They chose their subjects based upon their interests and their future career plans. Family had been particularly supportive in making decision-making, particularly the pupils' mothers. Pupils were happy with their choices although some were unhappy with one of their subject choices and some complained about their course or that the college was disorganised.

Blåfoss videregående – Pupils who attended ***Blåfoss*** had chosen it because of its good reputation, their friends were likely to attend it, and its location. Most of the pupils lived in the near vicinity and had attended the local *barneskole* and *ungdomsskole* together. Thus most pupils knew each other well; there was a real sense of community. The pupils had made their decisions about subjects based upon their interests and where they might attain good grades. The level of support they received was satisfactory, made easier with their good grades. They were happy with their decisions except for specific subject choices.

Vannsjø videregående skole – Pupils from ***Vannsjø*** tended to give a very mixed picture of their experiences. They tended to choose the school for *social* reasons - the school had a reputation for tolerating differences between pupils, their friends were also applying to study there, or a teacher had recommended it. However, many pupils also made *restricted*, *aspirational* or *practical* decisions as well. The school was close to the centre of Oslo and, therefore, easily accessible. It also had a fairly high entry requirement and, consequently, pupils believed they could succeed at ***Vannsjø***. When considering how decisions were made about which subjects to choose, almost 50% of the decisions were *aspirational* – that is, they were chosen with success or future aspirations in mind rather than as a result of their particular interests for a subject. The pupils had had very different experiences in terms of the support they had received and, likewise, they also varied in whether they were happy with the decisions they had made. This lack of consensus made the school unique in comparison with the other schools in the sample.

Sæther videregående skole – Pupils at ***Sæther*** had made their decision to apply there because of their interest in Media and Communication, a new course which was only available at ***Sæther***. They were interested in the subject and many had plans to pursue a career in the field. Consequently, 71.43% of the decisions about which school to attend, were *restricted* decisions. Interestingly, pupils were more likely to say they had chosen the subject because of future career plans rather than an interest in the subject. There was also the opportunity to spend their second year of study in England. The pupils were not satisfied with the level of support they had received, largely because the course was new and none of the guidance counsellors had any information about it. Many were also unhappy with the choices they had made – there had been many problems with the course. Negative experiences also tended to focus upon aspects of the course.

Nesby videregående skole - Pupils tended to choose their course because of a preference for the subject. Several of the pupils, however, had not chosen to study at ***Nesby*** and had been moved there during the second or third year because their grades were not high enough to continue in their existing school. Pupils described that they had received some support in their decision-making but were generally unhappy with the choices they had made. When looking closely at the levels of decision-making, 45% of the decisions about which school to attend were *restricted*.

Oppstrøm videregående skole – Pupils tended to have chosen to attend ***Oppstrøm*** for one of three reasons:- (a) because of the opportunity to study in England during their second year, (b) because they had met ***Oppstrøm*** pupils in England and decided to join their class upon their return to Norway, or (c) because the school was close in proximity to their home. Social reasons also impinged upon their choice of school whilst subject choices had been based upon individual preferences. Pupils were not entirely satisfied with the support they had received but were happy with the choices they had made. Many of their experiences, both positive and negative, were focused upon their experience in England.

Solfjell videregående skole – Pupils were academically able and had chosen to study the academic course (*allmenfag linje)* as a result of their ability. They had been encouraged by those around them to consider attending a school with a good reputation because of their grades. Their subjects had been chosen based upon their preferences and interests. They felt that they had received little support in making their decisions but that it had been there if they had needed it and many had known what they wanted to do or they felt that their high grades gave them many possibilities. In fact, this was a factor which made decision-making a little problematic for some. All the pupils were happy with the choices they had made and no single *restricted* decision had been made in terms of selection of school.

6.6.2 Patterns in Decision-making

Returning to types of decision-making outlined earlier in the chapter - *restricted, aspirational, practical, coincidental, social,* and *preferential* (see figure 14, pg 150) - it was possible to establish patterns in the application of this typology based upon a numerical count of the frequency in which each decision was made (see Appendix 16). For example, the two categories of decision-making most applied were *restricted* (24.35%), and *aspirational* (28.52%). Furthermore, 35% of all decision-making was focused around choice of school and 37% on choice of subjects. Whether to stay on and which qualification to choose were secondary choices. Certain types of decision-making were more common for certain types of choice. For example, *preferential* decision-making was most often used when deciding which subjects to study. It also became evident that the context in which the decisions were made was important, that is, the country, and more specifically, the

school, such that particular types of decision-making were more common within particular schools. The following section provides an account of this by matching the frequency of decision-making in the interviews with the reasoning given for the decisions. In so doing, it was possible to establish an explanation for the differential patterns and identify the influence of context in very real terms.

6.6.2.1 Restricted Decision-making

Restricted decision-making was a broad category which referred to any instance in which a pupil had been restricted in their choices. This might have been because of structural constraints within the educational system, parental expectations, or even another choice. It was equally common in both England and Norway, the exception being that Norwegian pupils were more likely to experience *restricted decision-making* in choosing to continue their education. It should be noted, however, that the data regarding decisions to *stay on* were not as elaborate as other choices.

School: With regard to *staying* on, the lowest levels of *restricted decision-making* were amongst pupils at **Hipford College, Stepleigh,** and ***Nesby***. Pupils in these schools felt that they had made an active choice compared with pupils in other schools.

Regarding choice of *qualification,* pupils at ***Solfjell*** and ***Oppstrøm*** were more likely to describe themselves as making *restricted decisions* about studying an academic course. The pupils from ***Solfjell***, in particular, felt that their good grades and family expectations prevented them from choosing a vocational line.

All pupils tended to report high levels of *restricted decision-making* in their choice of *school.* This was at its highest at **Stepleigh, *Sæther*,** and ***Nesby***. **Stepleigh** pupils chose to *stay on* in upper secondary education for social reasons and once they had made this decision they apparently forfeited their choice of *school.* This would explain why 40% of their decisions regarding where to study were perceived as restricted. Similarly, 71% of decisions made by pupils at ***Sæther*** regarding choice of *school* were restricted, largely because they prioritised their choice of course and this was not available in any other school in Oslo. Finally, 45% of decisions about choice of *school* for pupils at ***Nesby*** were restricted, not because of their priorities but because their low grades prevented them from genuinely making a choice about which *school* to attend.

Solfjell and ***Blåfoss*** differed from the other schools in that they had very 'low' levels of *restricted decision-making.* In fact, at ***Solfjell*** there was no single case of this. Being the schools with the highest entrance requirements, this meant that these pupils had the very highest grades in the sample. Such high grades gave the best opportunities for choice of *school.*

Levels of *restricted decision-making* in terms of *subject* choices was fairly evenly spread across all 10 schools with the exception of ***Nesby***. It would seem that this is because the level of *aspirational decision-making* was also low at ***Nesby***. Pupils felt that their choice of subject was restricted by low grades and poor opportunities for the future – they had chosen a subject because they didn't feel they could pass upper secondary school in any other area, or that there was no other subject area which interested them.

6.6.2.2 Aspirational Decision-making

This type of decision-making referred to the influences of grades, career plans, and aspirations for further studies and thus, it was a fairly broad category. It was more common amongst English pupils. *Aspirational decision-making* influenced English pupil's decision to *stay on* and which *subjects* they chose. It influenced Norwegian pupil's choice of *school* and, to a lesser extent, their choice of *subjects.* In deciding to *stay* on, the English pupils who chose to study at a college were greatly influenced by their aspirations for the future. It remained high amongst all pupils but for pupils attending the sixth forms, social factors were also a concern.

School: *Aspirational decision-making* featured in the choice of *school* for pupils studying at ***Solfjell, Blåfoss, Vannsjø,*** and ***Nesby***. Most pupils were concerned with getting a good education and their opportunities for the future. ***Nesby*** figures are slightly misleading since many of the pupils made decisions to study at other schools and were forced to study at ***Nesby*** in their second or third year of upper secondary. Comments about wishing to study at ***Nesby*** were made in relation to the good teaching rather than the academic standard of the school.

Choices of *subjects* were influenced by aspirations for the future in both countries. This type of decision-making was high in all institutions. The schools with the lowest levels of such decision-making were **Stepleigh, *Oppstrøm,*** and ***Nesby***. As already noted, **Stepleigh** does not have a long history of pupils continuing their education beyond the age of 16. Pupils tend to *stay on* for social rather than aspirational reasons. Pupils felt it was more important to continue their education because they could do so in a familiar environment. It was a straightforward choice to make and had very little to do with its contribution towards a long term career goal. It seems unlikely therefore, that their *subject* choices would be influenced by future aspirations to the same extent as schools where there are high expectations for future education and employment. At ***Nesby***, decision-making was generally poor in all categories, and in ***Oppstrøm*** pupils were more likely to display *preferential decision-making* in choice of *subjects*, possibly influenced by their previous year abroad.

6.6.2.3 Practical Decision-making

Practical decision-making was a narrow category which referred to any instance in which a pupil made a decision based upon pragmatic factors. In fact, overwhelmingly, proximity to a pupil's home heavily influenced their choice of *school* although it rarely dominated over *social decision-making.* Pupils in some schools also chose to prioritise *aspirational decision-making.* Practical influences were highest amongst Norwegian pupils which might reflect the greater number of schools pupils had to choose from.

School: *Practical decision-making* was generally very high with the exception of four schools – **Eddington, Stepleigh, *Sæther* and *Nesby*.** For the two English sixth forms pupils decided to remain at their 'local' sixth form. Proximity of school to their home may not, therefore, have been an issue. For pupils at ***Sæther***, *practical decision-making* was low because most had prioritised their choice of course, distance from home, therefore, became irrelevant. Pupils at ***Nesby*** had low grades and, therefore, were unable to make choices about which school to attend. Consequently, many of them had long distances to travel to get to school.

6.6.2.4 Coincidental Decision-making

This type of decision-making could, perhaps, be described as 'unexpected' or 'accidental'. Pupils encountered an event or experience which altered their perspective on their decision-making and led them to choose a different pathway than would otherwise have been their choice. This type of decision-making was the least common in both countries. The very nature of this form of decision-making makes it difficult to speak of patterns within the school context. It was clear, however, that the choice to *stay on* was the most commonly affected by *coincidental decision-making.* This would explain why it was more predominant in the English sample since Norwegian pupils were less likely to speak of choice when referring to the decision to continue their education. Furthermore, the most notable event which had altered the pupils' pathways was *employment.* This might have been work experience, a gap year, or an apprenticeship. Pupils realised from this that they would prefer to increase their employment chances by furthering their education.

School: *Coincidental decision-making* was the least common amongst **Eddington** pupils who, instead, focused upon *social* and *aspirational* reasons when deciding whether to *stay on,* perhaps because pupils were from a higher socio-economic background in which parents were more likely to have experience with the educational system.

6.6.2.5 Social Decision-making

Social decision-making was a broad category which referred to any instance in which a pupil had been influenced by other people. This might have been their family, their friends, the advice of a school teacher, or even the desire to participate in upper secondary education because of the perceived 'atmosphere'. *Social decision-making* was most common within the English sample. This type of decision-making was most often related to the choice of *school* and to some extent the choice of *subjects.* In England, it was also an influence in the decision to *stay on.* Norwegian figures relating to *staying on* were too low from which to draw realistic conclusions.

School: Pupils in **Eddington** and **Stepleigh** were the most likely to report *social decision-making* with regard to *staying on.* This was highest in **Stepleigh** with 43% of such decisions being for social reasons and 27% in **Eddington.** Such levels reflect the opportunity to remain with friends by continuing in their current school.

The level of *social decision-making* in deciding which *school* to attend was fairly comparable amongst all the schools. Some levels were lower, others were higher, depending upon the circumstances of that particular school. The exceptions to this were **Eddington** at 39%, ***Nesby*** at 5% and ***Sæther*** at 0%. In two instances the reasons for this were because pupils' priorities were different to most other pupils in the study. At ***Sæther***, the Media and Communication course was only available at that particular school and, thus, they really had no choice of school. In **Eddington**, there was a strong and positive atmosphere in which pupils had been involved throughout their lower secondary years and many wished to continue this. Having taken it for granted that they would *stay on*, *social decision-making* became focused on choice of school. This contrasts with the **Stepleigh** pupils where it was the familiar environment which influenced their decision to *stay on* and, having made this decision, their choice of *school* became a *restricted* choice. Finally, in ***Nesby***, many of the pupils had not received a choice about which *school* since their grades had been too low for them to genuinely make a decision about where they wished to study. Thus, the low levels of *social decision-making* reflected low levels of *any* decision-making about the choice of *school* rather than having priorities beyond social influences.

Social decision-making did not focus heavily in choice of *subjects* and thus, even high percentages can reflect only small numbers of pupils. In five of the schools (**Eddington, Stepleigh, Hipford College,** ***Vannsjø*** and ***Sæther***) the level of such decision-making was approximately 10%. **Brookfield College,** ***Solfjell,*** and ***Blåfoss*** were slightly lower but this is likely to reflect different priorities with nothing especially notable about such decision-making. Those pupils whose patterns of decision-making differed to most other pupils in the study were pupils studying at ***Oppstrøm*** where no single *social decision* was made regarding choice of *subjects,* and ***Nesby*** where a fifth of the decisions about *subject* were made for social reasons. In ***Nesby***, the pupils spoke of how their

parents had encouraged them to pursue art because of their talents for the subject. In ***Oppstrøm***, pupils' subject choices were influenced more by their preferences. It is not clear why this should be but possibly it illustrates the importance of the school context since these pupils were not based at ***Oppstrøm*** in the preceding year.

6.6.2.6 Preferential Decision-making

On the whole, *preferential decision-making* was a fairly narrow category which almost exclusively referred to pupil interest as an influence in choice of *subjects*. Preference also influenced English pupil's choice of *school*. *Preferential decision-making* was most common within the English and twice as common as evidenced within the Norwegian sample.

School: This type of decision-making was high amongst all pupils. Even at its lowest at ***Sæther***, 18% of decisions about choice of *subject* were based upon preference. Pupils at ***Sæther*** were studying Media and Communication, a vocational course. They had most often chosen it with a career in mind and thus their decision was categorised as *aspirational*. It was at its highest at ***Oppstrøm***, 44%, where it had taken priority over social factors.

In England pupils also made *preferential decisions* when choosing which institution to attend. The level of such decision-making in **Brookfield College** and **Eddington** were comparable at approximately 16%. Both **Hipford College** and **Stepleigh** were higher with 23% and 27% respectively. In England, interest and social influences tended to compete as priorities when choosing which institution to attend. This meant that when one category was high then the other must be low. The social environment in **Brookfield College** and **Eddington** were stronger than at **Hipford College** and **Stepleigh**. **Eddington** had a good reputation for upper secondary education and a strong sixth form whilst **Brookfield College** pupils were those interviewed at the city campus, a modern and centrally located building with a vibrant atmosphere. **Hipford College** tended to be weaker in terms of its social environment since it was located on the outskirts of the city and pupils described its social environment as poor. Also, at **Stepleigh**, the Stepwood Partnership dominated the decision-making environment there which meant that the decision to *stay on* gave them the possibility to study at five institutions other than **Stepleigh** with various *subject* options in each. This factor might explain the higher levels of *preferential decision-making* in choice of *school*.

Figure 20 Vignette 1 – *Jemima* – Eddington School - England

Jemima had chosen to study A2 maths, further maths, physics, general studies and AS psychology. She felt comfortable with her choice of subjects. Most of her family had chosen to study maths and she too was keen on the subject. She also wanted to study physics and had loved it at GCSE. Her third choice of A level was drama. She says, "My last choice, I was in a bit of a debate because basically, I wanted to do drama. I loved it at GCSE but it didn't fit in the column so I just, literally, looked down the last column at what I can do, said, 'I don't want to do biology', don't like it, and history, I didn't want to do, and the only possibilities were English literature and French. But, what with all the work from maths and further maths, which is quite hard, I thought I wouldn't have all the time for reading or all the things required for English literature and just did French instead".

When asked about choosing a school, Jemima said that she didn't really know much about other sixth forms and she didn't want to go to a college. She had looked at them but had decided that she was happy at **Eddington** and also that she probably wasn't confident enough to change to another school where all the other pupils already knew each other. However, she had wondered whether she should have gone elsewhere because she was often frustrated at being 'Joanna and Elaine's sister' or 'one of the Campbells'. Also, most of her friends had left school at 16 to study performing arts at either **Hipford** or **Brookfield College**. Her boyfriend was still at **Eddington** but she had felt very isolated and had become very clingy to him because of this. The one good friend she had made in her year group was Christopher but this had led other classmates to gossip and spread rumours about her relationship with him which had been very unpleasant. All of this had led to a very miserable time in Year 12.

In spite of her problems the previous year, things had improved in Year 13 when Jemima had decided to drop French and had chosen to study AS psychology instead. She wished she had never studied French because she felt she would never use it even though she loved to learn the language. She soon discovered that she found psychology easy and, being the eldest and most able in her class, her confidence was suddenly restored. Whereas she had always been 'top of the class' in the lower school, she was in competition with the most able pupils in upper secondary and this too had been a blow to her confidence. The change to psychology had proved to her that she was still a capable pupil and as a consequence she felt able to build new friendships.

6.7 Conclusions

The following section brings together the findings under the headings 'the importance of choice in decision-making' and 'the importance of context in decision-making'.

6.7.1 The Importance of Choice in Decision-making

Whether a pupil was satisfied with their educational experience and the decision-making process appeared to rest largely upon whether they had actively engaged within that experience. That engagement appeared to rest upon whether the pupil believed they had a *genuine choice* over their education, whether the options open to them reasonably allowed them to choose in favour or against a particular option. Could they choose *not* to stay on? Could they choose to study a vocational course instead of an academic one? Were there a reasonable number of schools from

which to choose? Could they select any combination of subjects they wished to study? Pupils at ***Nesby, Sæther,*** and **Stepleigh** all displayed high levels of dissatisfaction as a result of having their choices constrained whereas for pupils at ***Solfjell, Blåfoss*** and **Eddington,** there were few limitations on their hopes and aspirations. The importance of this is that when pupils actively engage within their education they contribute positively towards the context within which they are working. They focus upon what *can* be achieved rather than what *might* have been achieved. Psychologically, opportunities arise where lack of choice and dissatisfaction would otherwise restrict ideas and ambitions.

Three factors appear to determine whether a choice is perceived as genuine or not. Firstly, this will depend upon the *nature of the criteria* used for allocating choices to pupils. These criteria will be determined by the cultural priorities which underpin a society and the available resources. The implementation of such values, through the selection process, are clearly apparent through a brief consideration of the two countries. In Norway, it was important that the pupils received a broad knowledge-base, that the system was stream-lined to cater for the needs of all pupils, and that all pupils were treated equally. It was intended that pupil's decision-making was postponed beyond upper secondary education. In England, pupils narrow their knowledge-base as they progress through the educational system, there is a focus upon individual difference, upon assessment, and pupils are encouraged to make their choices earlier rather than later. These cultural priorities are enforced through the selection process so that certain opportunities are fostered and others not. Thus, for example, Norway's use of the average grade as a means of gaining access to various options ensures that the pupils with the broadest knowledge-base are provided with the greatest opportunities. Pupil perceptions about their choices and access to opportunities within the system will, inevitably, be affected by whether they are able to fulfil the criteria laid down through the selection process.

A second and related issue is whether the system provides *real alternatives*. Even if a pupil has sufficient exam results to gain access to the opportunities within the system, are the choices accessible according to the type of decision-making typical of most pupils? It is important to look at the patterns which pupils follow. Pupils prioritise their aspirations for the future but are also heavily influenced by social factors. Some will prioritise the location of a school, others want to stay on in a familiar environment. What constitutes a genuine choice is when real alternatives are also available, when a pupil has equal opportunity to choose one option over another. This must take account of both the physical and psychological access of options. Pupil satisfaction is low when they experience high levels of *restricted* decision-making. Consider the responses of the Norwegians who described a lack of choice in whether to stay on or not. This does not mean that they would not have stayed on since they recognised the value in doing so, they simply did not perceive it as a choice. Alternatively, consider a scenario where a female pupil chooses to study at

school x because all her friends were going to study there and because she knew all the teachers even though it would have been better for her to study at school y because they had all the subjects she wanted to study.

Finally, even if the selection process does not constrain a pupil's choices, and there are sufficient resources to provide a range of alternatives, pupils must also be equipped in themselves to make those choices. Most importantly, they need to appreciate that they will be required to make choices at some future juncture in their educational career and that, in order to make those choices successfully, they will need to have good grades, aspirations for the future, an awareness of their own abilities, their own preferences, and knowledge of the opportunities open to them. Various factors have been found to enhance this individual preparation for decision-making. Experience with decision-making, experience with success and failure in exams, parental support, and a general sense of coming closer to a goal were key elements in this research project.

6.7.2 The Importance of Context in Decision-making

Much of this chapter has focused upon the differences between pupils in England and Norway. Pupils have different priorities in their decision-making, their levels of satisfaction differ, they differ upon how much importance they attach to education, and they differ in levels of support. It would seem that there are a myriad of *possibilities* for any individual. There are not, however, a myriad of *opportunities* and this is where the restrictions upon decision-making and, consequently, perspectives begin. Individual pupils tend to make similar choices for similar reasons but the differences in the data are apparent when individual situations are contextualised.

There are two main contexts within this study – that of country and that of school. When similar choices and types of decision-making are viewed within these two contexts, so it becomes possible to establish differences in perspective; England versus Norway, ***Solfjell*** versus **Eddington** and so forth. Background factors inevitably have some impact but the most notable means of predicting pupil perspectives on the choices they experience are in relation to their country and their school.

Clearly the school context is heavily influenced by the cultural philosophy of a country since it is this which will determine the criteria used for providing opportunities to pupils and, in turn, for grouping them. Individuals of similar backgrounds, similar abilities, similar aspirations and similar interests make similar choices and decisions because the opportunities afforded to that 'type of pupil' are similar. It becomes problematic to separate the two because those choices, intrinsically, are a combination of what the individual brings with them to the decision-making process and opportunities afforded them. This combination of *individual background* and the *selection process* determine the contexts within which the pupils operate. Within the school context such factors nourish each other so that any commonalities are magnified. Pupils communicate with each other

and share the same psychological ground so that that context becomes an entity in itself. From this context, the perspectives arise and it is for this reason that school context was a particularly accurate and, perhaps, more concrete means of predicting the perspectives of pupils. Pupils were interviewed as individuals but their outlook was situated within the context of their school and their country.

Chapter Seven – Interpretation and Discussion

This chapter is concerned with drawing together the findings in order to answer the research questions (section 7.1) and to elaborate more fully upon the central themes throughout the study (section 7.2).

7.1 Answering the Research Questions

7.1.1 Research Question 1

What are the stated aims and purposes of policy in upper secondary education in England and Norway and how are these achieved?

There have been many common concerns within the policies of England and Norway. In both countries educational policy has aimed to meet the needs of the individual through personal development, whilst also meeting the needs of society through focusing upon the skills which individuals adopt and the impact these might have upon the future economic sustainability of the country. Related to this there have been concerns with increased participation, access to higher education, breadth of curricular, and issues related to parity of esteem between the academic and vocational lines of study. In both countries, a coherent framework within upper secondary education has been viewed as a means of achieving the goals of policy such that pupils are able to successfully navigate the system. The differences between the countries appear in terms of when they were implemented. The Norwegian upper secondary system took its current form in 1994, whereas in England the reform of upper secondary education is a current project. Furthermore, the English model of support and guidance seems to be more developed as a means of encouraging pupils to plan for their future careers and education than in Norway.

To think about the aims and purposes of policy and its implementation has required an understanding of the curriculum traditions and views of knowledge upon which the English and Norwegian educational systems are founded; it has not been possible to consider the policy documents in isolation. The humanist/essentialist and rationalist/encyclopaedic traditions of England and Norway respectively, and the individualist and collectivist political cultures, have led to the development of two very different educational systems and any policy-development or implementation must cohere with such traditions. English policy has, until very recently, been focused upon the narrowing down of choice culminating in the studying of three A levels which eventually lead to a single subject of study at degree level. Current efforts to broaden the curriculum and to integrate vocational subjects within an academic framework are faced with long-term prejudices towards a particular way of thinking about education and assessment. This is

apparent with concerns about standards and the possible demise of the A level. Increased participation levels are also problematic since the educational system is elitist whilst also demanding that individuals attain a certain basic level of knowledge before they may gain access to the next level within the system. These factors create unnecessary barriers or limit *horizons for action* (Hodkinson et al, 1996). What we see with the current reform in England is an effort by policy-makers to overcome such problems by creating an overarching umbrella framework of diplomas which span the 14-19 age group. In this way, the lower secondary-upper secondary transition point, traditionally a time when very many young people exit the educational system, is concealed. Furthermore, the introduction of vocational subjects at an earlier age can encourage pupils to actively choose this line of study rather than opting for it in upper secondary if they have performed badly in their more academic GCSEs.

In Norway, increased levels of participation and a coherent educational system have been in operation for over two decades. Upper secondary schooling and even higher education are not viewed as distinct stages within the educational system. The whole process is aimed at creating citizens although more recently there has been an increased focus upon market trends and the need for the education system to serve the economy. Almost all Norwegians are given access to upper secondary schooling as a result of low entrance requirements though grades continue to provide restrictions upon which courses might be available. In line with encyclopaedism they must follow a core curriculum throughout, and in the final two years of their schooling, may choose to study a range of additional specialisms. This breadth of knowledge is particularly important. It is implemented through the application of the *gjennomsnitt* or average grade which provides pupils with access to opportunities within the system. The coherence of the system is also evident in the presentation of courses, qualifications, and schools. Pupils can easily access information about opportunities, and even the process of applying is straightforward and automated. This may explain why the Norwegian pupils were more likely than the English pupils to view upper secondary education as part of a ladder of progression through the system. Possibly for this reason also, however, the guidance system in Norway is under-developed and pupils are given few opportunities to engage in the decision-making process.

Although the historic traditions of the two countries have important consequences for upper secondary policy, so too does the influence of modern day economics. In both countries, but particularly England, this was especially significant. The rhetoric of policy focused upon the importance of all citizens engaging in the 'knowledge economy'. It is the responsibility of individuals to adopt the necessary skills for the future success of the nation. Again the 'National Framework' for careers education and guidance in England has played a part in providing opportunities for planning and developing approaches to future goals. In Norway, such approaches are far from being implemented and, for many, pose a threat to the ethos of the country.

Finally, the two countries have one very important feature in common when considering the purpose of policy. The needs of society are particularly dominant when compared with the needs of individuals. Of course, policy states clearly that the focus is upon the pupils but, at the same time, one observes the implementation of policy which is contrary to this. In England, pupils are encouraged to develop a strategy, a personal set of choices which will serve their future career. The economic concerns of policy dominate leaving pupils with very little space to simply live through their education, to make mistakes, change their options, and to move through the system in a fashion that benefits their needs at a given time. Within the English system, pupils are encouraged to make the right choices at the right times with a goal in mind. This is very unlike the Norwegian system but the focus on society rather than the individual remains. It is deemed important that all pupils have a right to upper secondary schooling but in viewing everyone as equal, the system fails to acknowledge the differences between pupils. The approach to increased levels of participation and a broad curricular remove, and even mask, the possibility for deviation from the norm.

7.1.2 Research Question 2

What are the decision-making experiences of pupils in upper secondary education in England and Norway concerned with educational and career choices, and what are the major similarities and differences between the two countries?

The actual process of decision-making in England and Norway was very similar. Within the interview data there were six key types of decision which the pupils adopted in choosing their upper secondary options. In this sense, the young people in the study simply demonstrated the natural and most obvious ways of making decisions within whichever boundaries they lived their lives. The differences arose, however, when considering the particulars of those boundaries.

English pupils were more active in their approach to decision-making, were better supported by the system and, perhaps consequently, viewed upper secondary education as an option rather than perceiving the educational system as a single pathway up to the age of 19 and beyond. This differed with the Norwegian pupils who clearly positioned themselves within a hierarchy in the educational system. They were more passive in their approach, focused more upon what they received from the education system rather than what they could take from it, and felt less supported. At the same time, however, they viewed the educational system as a whole and did not consider dropping out as a realistic option.

It is possible that the English system, its lack of coherence, its reduced levels of participation, the focus upon planning for the future, and current reforms within the system, in fact, create an environment in which pupils are encouraged to become actively involved. Of course, it may also

provide gaps in the system for the disaffected to fall through. In Norway, staying on is a very simple process and making an application for a particular school or course of study is straightforward. At this stage in their education, decision-making is a largely unrehearsed and unnecessary skill. What is problematic about this is that without active involvement within the system, pupils fail to explore all the avenues which may be open to them. Furthermore, decision-making is an important life-skill and failure to develop such a skill has repercussions in terms of choice and opportunity in later life.

The context of decision-making is crucial in the choices which are available to pupils. Individuals make their decisions based upon their own abilities, preferences, background, previous experiences, and future ambitions. At the same time, however, their perceptions are heavily influenced by the environment in which they live their lives and the context in which opportunities are presented to them. School and country were the key elements which predicted how the pupils approached their upper secondary choices – which school a pupil should apply to, which subjects should be prioritised, whether to study a mix of academic and vocational subjects, and so forth. Thus, in speaking of similarities and differences between England and Norway, it is vital to consider the cultural setting in which the decisions were made since, without doing so, these decisions and the pupils' perspectives are indecipherable. In this sense, the decision-making processes were very different. Similarities, however, were more apparent between school contexts rather than national contexts. There was some suggestion that this was related to the influence of factors such as socio-economic background which, like national cultures, served to create contexts for learning. This is discussed under research question three.

Not only did the selection process of the educational system lead to certain types of individuals being grouped together but, more importantly, the collective environment served to reinforce any commonalities between the pupils and to further consolidate a shared perspective upon education and the future. It is possible that this also influenced their perceptions of their past experiences as well. It is, therefore, crucial that policy-makers are conscious of the selection process in operation within the educational system and the impact this has upon creating contexts. Positive and motivated environments can be self-sustaining; pupils can be driven to progress and to actively contribute towards their education. The converse, however, is also a possibility.

7.1.3 Research Question 3

How do factors such as gender, race and class affect the experiences of pupils in upper secondary education in England and Norway, particularly in relation to the issue of choice and access?

The decisions which pupils make about their education and the opportunities afforded to them are closely related to the issue of choice and access. Some pupils may feel they have many possibilities open to them whilst others may feel inhibited and unable to progress successfully through the system. Factors such as gender, race, and class were a concern – was the decision-making process hindered in any way by structural inequalities within the educational system, and within the society as a whole?

As noted above, contexts for learning were particularly influential in the approach of pupils towards decision-making and whether they perceived certain opportunities as available to them. Gender, race and class are all factors which, potentially, can shape the contexts in which pupils learn. Indeed, there was some indication from the interview data that race and class affected pupil's experiences in this study although, at this stage, it should be noted that the findings are preliminary and further exploration is necessary.

The data concerned with ethnicity and nationality were largely derived from the Norwegian sample since the number of such pupils within the English sample was particularly low and made it problematic for any conclusive analyses to be performed. The data suggested that pupils from an ethnic-minority background were hindered largely through their parents' situation – a lack of knowledge of the educational system within Norway, differential values of education, and differential expectations of the system. Such pupils were also hindered by the selection process in Norway which was dependent upon their average grade at the end of lower secondary school. This system meant that pupils were required to perform well across all subjects in order to be in a position to apply for places in schools with higher reputations. With limited language abilities and other related problems often leading to lower grades, such pupils were forced to attend the less prestigious schools and thus enter what many referred to as the 'B' schools.

The evidence concerning the impact of class is somewhat limited because the socio-economic status of the pupils could only be reliably established in two of the schools (two English schools with sixth forms). Furthermore, no connection was found between class and the nature of pupils' responses in the questionnaires. In the interviews, however, there was some suggestion that those from the more affluent area were better resourced and had higher aspirations for their future. In particular, it reflected the support which was available outside the school since parents of those from a lower socio-economic background appeared to lack the necessary experience of upper

secondary schooling. As with ethnicity/nationality amongst the Norwegian pupils, the contexts in which the pupils made their decisions was important since such contexts created the parameters in which further decisions were made or in which aspirations for the future were formed. However, what was also crucial was how the pupils came to enter such a context and this seems to be related to their family background and the support with which their parents were able to provide them.

Even though participation rates in Norway are high, and rising in England, it would seem that those at the lower end of the spectrum continue to represent structural inequalities in the system. Policy-makers fail to address the process of selection which continues to create contexts in which the less advantaged pupils within society can utilise resources. Only in acknowledging that the concept of meritocracy is flawed without due consideration of the 'capital' that contributes towards merit, can policy-makers effectively counter institutional prejudice. Since upper secondary qualifications are utilised as a means of gaining access to higher education and other social benefits, the inequalities within the educational system will be perpetuated within society.

A related concern within the study is the issue of opportunity in relation to pupil agency and the level of satisfaction experienced by pupils in making their upper secondary choices. It was found that individuals must be prepared for making decisions and well-supported in a number of ways. A good social network is clearly important but, moreover, the school plays a crucial role in providing pupils with feedback about their own abilities, encouraging them to plan for the future, to identify preferences, strengths and weaknesses, and to guide them thoroughly through the decision-making process. A further aspect of this relates to the extent to which pupils perceive their choices as realistic. This may explain why the Norwegian pupils seemed more passive in their decision to stay on in upper secondary education – it was not a choice for them. All pupils must believe that what they can contribute towards the decision-making process is worthwhile and has attainable consequences. Structural inequalities create very definite constraints upon pupil agency but restrictions to the process may be equally evident amongst other pupils.

7.1.4 Research Question 4

To what extent are *national policy*, its *implementation* and *pupils' perspectives* socio-cultural constructs, and what might be learnt from contextualising upper secondary education?

England and Norway, very clearly, present two distinct cultures. Yes, they are both developed countries, they both respond to the same international pressures, and in many ways, the educational policy, its implementations and the pupils' perspectives have much in common. For example, as young people, all the pupils tended to focus upon the influence of friends and family, or upon whether they liked particular subjects they were studying. Alternatively, both countries were

concerned with increased participation in education and establishing a coherent framework within upper secondary education. These similarities would suggest that policy and pupils' perspectives are not socio-cultural constructs. To reach such a conclusion, however, would be erroneous and would miss the important cultural nuances which create distinct differences between England and Norway. It is such nuances which policy-makers have neglected when borrowing policies from other cultures.

The importance of curriculum traditions upon policy and its implementation has already been discussed. Likewise, the influence of the context upon decision-making process and the perceptions of pupils has been raised as an important issue. The culture shapes the educational system. In turn, the educational system and the opportunities it affords pupils will shape their decision-making. Pupils do act as individuals, creating their own particular pathways, but there are many factors which form boundaries to this process. National culture is, perhaps, the overriding factor in influencing such constraints. Norway's use of the average grade in order to encourage attainment across a broad range of subjects, and as a means of providing opportunities is an obvious example. To implement this policy in England would not only be unfeasible in terms of its practical application, but would not make sense in terms of the pupils' understanding of the education system. Pupils in England expect to have a far greater degree of freedom over the choices they make in upper secondary education. It is, perhaps, because current policy and past are so integrally related, that the English government has consistently failed to overhaul the A level system.

In contextualising upper secondary education, this study has contributed to the growing body of educational research which suggests that uncritical policy-borrowing is a foolish and ill-informed strategy to adopt (Osborn, 2004). It has highlighted how a superficial consideration of the issues can be misleading. It also raises the issue of agency in pupils and teachers, and the lack of respect policy-makers have in implementing top-down policies without concern for those in the classrooms. To expect them to implement and adopt a policy that is successful in another country is unfair in terms of dismissing their cultural identity, unfair in terms of the workload that will be involved in making it 'fit' within a different culture, and unfair in terms of placing them in a situation that may very well fail and for which they will be judged rather than those who borrowed the policy. *National policy*, its *implementation* and *pupils' perspectives* are all socio-cultural constructs, shaped by their environment and part of the ever-developing culture in which they are located.

7.2 Themes and Discussion

Five central themes are discussed - *the process of decision-making, choice and decision-making, context and approaches to decision-making, careers guidance and other support mechanisms,* and *comparative approaches to assessment.* The first three themes relate specifically to the research questions and theoretical framework. The topics of guidance and assessment, however, emerged from the data and, therefore, are supported by additional literature. All five are discussed below:-

7.2.1 The process of decision-making

Decision-making, using Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson's, concept of *careership* is a pragmatic and rational process. Individuals play an active part in constructing their local context and act within that context; their decision-making being characterised by routines and turning points. It is important to note that Hodkinson et al developed this concept in response to data which they gathered when following the pathways of young people making the transition from school into work. Its application as a theory for decision-making in this study, therefore, is an approximation. Although the findings from this research support the model there are details which also contribute further as a result of its application within a different setting.

The young people in this study were essentially concerned with those decisions surrounding the transition from lower secondary into upper secondary education. They were asked to reflect upon this process, the issues which had underpinned their decisions, the support they had received, and decisions they had made through their upper secondary schooling. They were also asked to evaluate their experiences and to speak about their plans for the future. As was the case with other research (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 1997, 1999), it was very difficult to predict individual patterns in decision-making. In fact, although some pupils tended to adopt a particular approach, what was more likely was the application of particular types of decision-making to particular types of choice. As already discussed earlier, this might be evident, for example, with pupils tending to choose which school to attend based upon their familiarity with it, whereas pupils tended to decide which subjects to choose based upon what they were interested in.

The data from this study demonstrates that all pupils, regardless of which nationality or country of residence, tended to approach decision-making similarly. They responded to their situation in a variety of ways but all of which could be classified under six different labels - restricted, aspirational, practical, co-incidental, social and preferential. Thus, when making their choices they were influenced by (a) constraints beyond their control, (b) by aspirations related to their ability, (c) by practical matters, (d) by coincidental or happenstance factors, (e) by social influences, and (f) by individual preferences. If one groups these six classifications further, it is apparent that pupils were influenced on three levels:-

- *personal elements* (aspirational and preferential)
- *external influences* (restricted, practical, and social), and
- *coincidental factors*

Only the *personal elements* can stand free of external constraints leading one to conclude that individual agency is not a straightforward concept. Furthermore, even pupils' aspirations and preferences, key factors in their identity development, cannot stand free of the nature of assessment applied within a given country and the selection process used in sifting able from less able pupils. This suggests that no single element of choice and decision-making in those upper secondary pupils in this study was autonomous of external constraints. Law, Meijers and Wijers make this point. "'Choice' is a contemporary mantra; but the use of the term in some policy documents, as though it were a wholly individual matter, massively fails to appreciate contemporary social and commercial dynamics of identity formation" (2002:443). Similarly, Chisholm and Du Bois-Reymond (1993) and Ahier and Moore (1999) both warn that, whilst young people are free to create their own biographies, youth transitions must be understood in terms of networks of relationships.

What is apparent from the concept of *careership* and the conclusions reached in this study is that decision-making cannot be analysed free of context. This is discussed more fully later in the chapter (section 7.2.3), but what it suggests is that the issue of agency needs to be clarified. This is, perhaps, where Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is of most use. *Habitus* refers to an individual's beliefs and ideas which, whilst internal to that person, are also influenced by the outside culture in which that person lives. Thus *habitus* may be perceived of as a culturally-created cognitive schema which develops within an individual as a means of making sense of the world, and once formed, serves to affect the perceptions of the world which that person has. External influences as described in this study, therefore, may simply be perceived as aspects of the system or context in which pupils are making their choices. Individuals are still able to make active decisions, to move between different options, and to utilise the resources they bring with them from their backgrounds even though, when broken down into different influences, it may appear that they have very little agency. It is because they are a part of a particular culture and have internalised features of this environment that they are able to think and act within it. They are part of the context, and as McDermott's (1993) example of the threads creating a rope illustrates, the individual and the context create something entirely different from what they were when viewed apart. It is, therefore, perhaps unwise to attempt to present the influences upon decision-making in terms of an internal-external dichotomy.

Having established that all pupils, regardless of whether they were living within England and Norway, made decisions in similar ways, albeit constrained by their own particular contexts, it is important to consider whether *careership* can be applied as a model for decision-making in the

context of this study. Hodkinson et al suggest that choices are made in a rational and pragmatic way. This means that individuals assess their situation and the opportunities which are realistically available to them. This aspect of the concept is compatible with the findings of this study. Few pupils tended to dream about possibilities beyond their lives. In fact, they were often extremely grounded by their situation and aware of the constraints placed upon them. Secondly, pupils did interact with their *field* in the sense that they sought information, made choices, responded to others, and generally acted such that changes occurred within their lives. This does not, however, remove the boundaries that external or unplanned events can have upon individuals. Finally, Hodkinson et al suggested that pupils' careers were characterised by changes and constants. It is problematic to draw any conclusions in relation to this since this study took a 'snapshot' of the pupils rather than following the actual processes of decision-making. However, from their recollections it was clear that for some, the pupils' choices had been smooth and straightforward, whilst for others it had been dramatic and unexpected, or that specific events had led them to make changes to their plans. This being the case, this too would suggest that the data from this study coheres with Hodkinson et al's work.

Whilst this study supports the concept of *careership* and other studies which draw attention to the complexity involved in the decision-making process, it is considered misleading to over-emphasise the 'trials and tribulations' which the pupils experienced. Yes, pupils had plans which are marked by the unexpected, that were beyond their control, they experienced disappointment and frustration, but they also knew the system in which they were operating and acted accordingly. This is more than being restricted in their outlook (*horizons for action*) or pragmatically evaluating what their options are, which they do, but it is also about understanding the culture and educational system in which they live and planning their lives accordingly. This, in turn, leads to many pupils successfully navigating the system.

Perhaps because this study asked the pupils to evaluate a two or three year period, they were able to recall events without being embroiled in the emotion of the experience. This study benefits from the temporal distance of the events which allowed the pupils to be reflexive and thus the significance of any single event was judged as part of the upper secondary experience rather than as a free-standing event. This was evidenced, for example, by pupil's ability to talk about bullying in a calm and rational manner. Other studies have adopted a different approach in their methodology such that recurrent interviews monitor the decision-making process as it occurs (Ball et al, 2000, Bloomer & Hodkinson, 1997, 1999) and, in so doing, they capture the complexity of the process. The problem with this, however, is that pupils' perceptions may change over time and that focusing upon events as they occur may lead the researcher to attach more significance to them than the pupils do so when viewed over a longer time-scale.

The limitations of the concept of *careership* and other studies which focus upon decision-making have been discussed by White (2002, 2007 forthcoming) who suggests that existing research has failed to recognise the complexity of the decision-making process. He writes, "Prominent studies have either not developed models of the decision-making process at all (eg, Ball et al, 2000) or have attempted to pass off the identification of influential factors as models of action (Hodkinson et al, 1996)" (White, 2007 forthcoming). Furthermore, he argues for localised empiricism as a better method for informing policy-makers since vague theories are difficult to interpret and understand; researchers should focus upon the local and untheorised environment. In his study of pupils reaching the end of their compulsory education, he argues for a 'choice model' which conceptualises the decision-making process as the interaction between the *stage* and *type* of decision being made. It is a simplistic and straightforward model whilst also highlighting the complexity of the process. Nevertheless, the concept of *pragmatic rationalism* offers researchers the possibility to engage in broader issues. With regard to this study, for example, it assists in understanding how rational action can run parallel to individual biographies.

Those white, middle class pupils who were successful within the educational system, who had the grades to support their plans, who had the family background that encouraged them to think about a university education and career from an early age, and whose needs were entirely matched to the system, had the luxury of adopting an approach which *superficially* may be described as 'technical rational' (Hodkinson et al, 1996). These pupils often made pragmatic rational decisions in their daily lives but, at the same time, their process of decision-making about the bigger issues such as which career to follow or which school to attend, were often more straightforward than those who lacked the necessary *cultural capital* to easily navigate the system. They made rational decisions within their *horizons for action* but their 'success' disguised their boundaries and created the illusion of a human capital approach. Policy-makers need to be alert to the potential difficulties in deciphering the fundamental nature of decision-making.

7.2.2 Choice and decision-making

Choice – as an *opportunity* rather than as a decision – was a recurring theme, particularly within the comparative findings. It was evident that choice had important implications for equality of access to resources, pupils' perceptions of what was attainable (*horizons for action*) and, moreover, it influenced their agency as individuals. Pupils needed to believe that certain opportunities were available to them if they were to act within the educational system. This finding was first evident with the questionnaire data when a factor analysis of the pupils' responses showed that the Norwegian pupils tended to be more passive in their approach to upper secondary education and to focus upon what the system administered to them, whereas the English pupils focused more upon what they could take from the system, and were active in their approach. In the interview data the Norwegian pupils were more likely to express dissatisfaction with their experiences and to

complain about the fairness of the system. It has been supposed that the coherence of the Norwegian educational system and its central organisation as a result of its focus on a collectivist political culture are at the root of these findings. This compares with the English system which, although chaotic and often incoherent, promotes the role of the individual.

Pupils needed to believe that the opportunities were really there if they were to be motivated into participating in the decision-making process; simply providing a range of options meant nothing unless the pupils could readily access these options. A prime example of this was found with regards to the university fees in England. Many of the pupils felt their choices were frozen by the amount of money involved, particularly since large amounts were clearly beyond their imagination or experience at the end of their upper secondary schooling. It led many pupils to question whether they should attend university at all although a frequent solution, particularly for those pupils coming from working class backgrounds, was to apply to a local university and live at home with their parents. In their study, Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005) found that 78% of the students who chose to live at home whilst at university did so for financial reasons. Other reasons included issues to do with whether or not university was a threat to their identity and perceptions regarding transitions to adulthood, the distinction being between middle class and working class values and *cultural capital.* The issue of opportunity also has interesting ramifications with regard to the underlying belief, amongst those who support the marketisation of education, that increased choice is positive because it extends individual freedom (Gewirtz et al, 1995).

The obvious issue raised here is whether the contexts created by the educational system and the culture are fair and just. Pupil agency implies action but may equally imply inaction. As noted by Ball et al (2002) in discussing the concept of choice (see section 1.4), it has resonances of freedom and liberation but hides the constraints of factors such as *gender* and *class.* Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Two, these factors can heavily shape pupil identity and the way in which they perceive the opportunities open to them. The remainder of this sub-section considers the impact of *ethnicity, nationality,* and *class* upon the pupils' perspectives in this study. Though *gender* was an issue for Norwegian pupils within the questionnaire data (see section 5.2.2), this was unsupported within the interview data and, therefore, is not discussed here.

7.2.2.1 Ethnicity/Nationality

The most striking finding concerning structural factors and their influence upon decision-making was found amongst the ethnic-minority pupils within Norway. Such pupils were less likely to be living in a privately owned home, their fathers were less likely to have an upper secondary education, and both parents were less likely to be employed. Furthermore, in the questionnaire data, pupils from an ethnic-minority background were less likely to be satisfied with the options

available to them, their friends were not likely to stay on, and they were more influenced by their parents' preferences than other pupils in the study, and were more likely to consider dropping out of school than pupils of native ethnicity. From the interview data, it would seem that family situation had a bearing upon the support pupils received in their decision-making and the value they attached to their education from an early age. This finding was apparent amongst pupils from a non-Norwegian background as well as those of ethnic-minority origins.

Perhaps, with limited knowledge of the Norwegian education system or with different expectations of it, the parents of such pupils are unable to give the valuable direction that their children need. As noted earlier, there are particular issues within the Norwegian guidance system which make the pupils more dependent upon the advice they can receive from elsewhere. Where this also, is unavailable, such pupils appear to flounder. Such difficulties also exist in England even though not apparent in the data available here. For example, in a study of parents choosing a secondary school for their children, Gewirtz et al note of immigrant families, "Their lack of direct experience and knowledge of the English school system and/or lack of necessary cultural or linguistic resources inhibit them in the fulfilment of their aspirations for their children" (1995:182).

The experiences of the pupils in this study highlight the importance of support in the decision-making process. They also draw attention to the problems in adopting a meritocratic approach in the choices pupils are offered. By selecting individuals based upon their average grade or *gjennomsnitt*, those who experience difficulties within the system tend to be grouped together. This may create a context for decision-making which may reinforce inequalities and the possibility for sub-cultural attitudes to be fostered. One must be wary, however, in referring broadly to the experience of 'ethnic-minority' families. Ball, Reay and David (2002) discuss the multiple experiences of men from ethnic-minority backgrounds in choosing higher education institutions, and found that *class* was an integral aspect of the process.

7.2.2.2 Class

Decision-making was evidently a 'raced' experience but, in a very different way it was also a 'classed' experience. The schools were originally selected within different socio-economic areas since it was anticipated that establishing patterns in pupils' backgrounds before meeting with them might prove to be problematic. However, for eight of the institutions pupils were able to travel from another area to school if they so wished. Consequently, the only two schools which could reliably be considered in relation to *socio-economic class* were **Eddington** and **Stepleigh**, that is, the two schools with sixth forms in England in which the pupils from the local community remained in their original catchment area. In practice, this often happened with the other schools but not to the extent where it could be considered an effective measure.

For those pupils located at **Eddington**, the school in the higher socio-economic area, the approach to decision-making was more positive and more active. These pupils made plans for their futures, they had the support at home in making their decisions, they achieved the grades required for successful entry into upper secondary schooling, they had aspirations for the future, and for very many they fulfilled their plans. They experienced the disappointments and frustrations that Ball et al (2000) refer to, but the nature of their decision-making was very different to those pupils in the school situated in the lower socio-economic areas. Pupils at **Stepleigh** were generally more passive in their approach to decision-making and their future aspirations. Many had experienced *restricted* decision-making in their choice of school or course. These were the pupils who experienced the disappointments, the ups and downs, the turning points, and a generally unpredictable future, which much of the literature refers to. As with those pupils in Norway from an ethnic-minority background, family background and experience within the educational system was important. Clearly, *cultural capital* need not only be related to concrete factors such as wealth, but equally, knowledge and advice. Indeed, Hatcher (1998) refers to parental educational experience, self-confidence, aspirations, support and money. Once again, it is apparent that choice and access, pupil agency, and pupil identity are tightly woven concepts in which context almost defines the very nature of the exchange.

7.2.3 Context and approaches to decision-making

In line with much of the research outlined in Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (see Chapter Two), context proved to play a significant part in determining how the pupils perceived their educational experience and their choices. CHAT theorists suggest that through interaction with our environment and application of the tools around us, we come to internalise ways of acting and thinking. There is evidence within this study to support such a view. Specifically, such perceptions were shaped by the national and the school contexts. It might be useful to examine what created these different contexts since it was the nature of these different environments which proved to be the one predictive factor in determining pupil perspective, over and above individual characteristics. Crucial to our understanding of these two contexts is the selection process of individuals into specific environments – selection through the *external constraints* of the educational systems and self-selection through the *internal needs* of the pupils themselves.

The selection processes of the educational systems were clearly evident. There has been much discussion of this in earlier chapters and it seems unnecessary, therefore, to reiterate the specific details. Evidently, however, issues of choice, attainment of particular grades, a focus upon a broader curricular, and so forth, are all factors influenced by many years of cultural traditions shaping the educational systems. That pupils grow up within this context may mean that they accept the system without questioning it, and moreover, that they come to hold values and to make assumptions which are also shaped by these cultural traditions. Individual agency, therefore, much

as Hodkinson et al have described in referring to *horizons for action,* is grounded by the national context and culture of a given society.

Whilst understanding the influence of national contexts is rather a complex process, school contexts were often simpler to grasp, perhaps because the environment and daily routines were more visible, and because the pupils were more aware of contextual factors which impinged upon them. They also highlighted commonalities between England and Norway; where the guiding principle within two schools was similar, so too, the pupils' perspectives shared some common approaches. That school contexts influenced pupils' perceptions does not mean that they lacked agency. What appeared to occur is that, in many instances, the pupils self-selected environments in which they felt their views on education, and perhaps life, would be suitably attuned to those who were also studying or teaching there, a finding supported by the work of James & Bloomer (2001). Those factors which contributed to the context included the location of the school and its proximity to a pupil's home or public transport, the socio-economic background of the school and the families in the surrounding area, the appearance of the school, its administrative organisation, the nature of the curricular focus or specific courses that were on offer, the extent of the school's resources, the learning or social atmosphere and the possibility to succeed, and finally, whether the school made specific allowances for those with poorer grades.

That pupil choice was influenced by the school context meant that how it came to be formed was important in describing and predicting pupils' perspectives. Although the pupils displayed individual agency in making a choice and, although schools apparently developed unique contexts, those contexts may well have evolved in response to the demands of a particular national educational system. This being the case, what may be found is a process of *matching* – a system in which external constraints shape local contexts and which individual pupils come to merge into, later contributing their own views and shaping the existing context and ethos of the environment. Thus in focusing upon pupils' perceptions one witnesses a multi-layered concept.

The process described above again brings into question the issue of individual agency and how it might be understood. Once again it is clear that pupils' perceptions cannot be evaluated as an autonomous concept but, instead, must be viewed within the educational context at local and national levels, and this means acknowledging that external constraints must have an important part to play in pupil decision-making. Furthermore, pupil perspectives, the way in which a person recalls events from their past, evaluates the choices they have made, describes their aspirations for the future, can be heavily influenced by the environment in which they are studying. As noted previously (section 7.2.1), pupils were interviewed at the end of their studies; they were at a time in their lives when they were about to leave upper secondary education and move into the world of work or into higher education. Their situation was such, therefore, that they were in a good

position to evaluate their whole upper secondary experience without necessarily feeling the vulnerabilities that they might have experienced whilst in the midst of the decision-making process. They were also in a position where they were likely to have given some consideration to how their upper secondary education might influence future choices. In spite of the potential to be 'objective' about their experiences, pupil recollection and evaluations were heavily coloured by their environment. They were no longer emotionally caught up with the process but their perceptions, nevertheless, remained shaped by those experiences. Those who chose media and communication, for example, came to have very poor aspirations for the future, believing that their qualification would not stand them in good stead for future employment or training. Those who chose to study in a school with a strong academic environment recalled a good support network and were positive about their future choices. The way in which the pupils remembered and evaluated their experiences was about shared experiences and this raises the issue of whether certain contexts are destined to emerge. At what point do pupils perspectives begin to merge? Is it when they enter a particular context or are there prerequisites which underpin their choices? Recall Lemke's suggestion earlier in this thesis – ".... we gradually become our villages: we internalize the diversity of viewpoints that collectively make sense of all that goes on in the community" (2002:34).

It seems likely that a combination of previous experiences, which influence the selection of a particular school, and shared experiences with pupils in the new upper secondary environment, both influenced the development of a shared perspective. For example, consider the following scenario based upon experiences described by some of the pupils in this study. A particularly academic pupil, who has been dissatisfied with her lower secondary experiences because she has felt herself to be an outcast amongst her peers, chooses to continue her education in an upper secondary school requiring higher grades. In her new situation she finds that she is amongst other high achievers and is able to share her feelings about her earlier experiences. In so doing, the pupils form a shared identity about themselves as 'able pupils' in relation to others and about the context in which they now study. In this way, an individual is influenced by their context but plays in important role in contributing to it as well. This example highlights the role of identity development in the development of contexts and perception and also falls in line with the issues raised earlier pertaining to structural factors. Pupils from specific backgrounds may choose to study in specific environments as a result of their race, gender, socio-economic background, or other factor particular to their earlier experiences, and this may then lead to the development of shared identities and contexts within a given institution.

Hedegaard's (1999, 2001) model of *learning through participation in institutionalised practice* provides a useful way of conceptualising pupil's agency within their context, particularly at an institutional level. As noted earlier, this is a model of learning but is easily applied to the decision-

making process (see figure 2). Pupils have their own personalities and identities but any action or decision they make is set against the context in which they are located; decisions are not made in vacuums. The context may occur at a local level, or the pertinent influences may be derived from the institution or society as a whole. Hedegaard suggests that whichever context is involved, the individual cannot be viewed as anything but an integral part of this context.

It is tempting to believe from this description that context is a blurred concept to describe the environment in which a person operates. Using Bourdieu's *field* theory, however, also utilised by Hodkinson et al, Hedegaard emphasises the influences of culture upon individual action. Individuals adopt different *positions* in society according to their *cultural capital* and thus their practical participation at an institutional level may be translated very differently from one individual to another. Thus, the range of influences and contexts, in connection with individual personalities, serve to create the possibility for individual agency. Concrete examples of such decision-making can be found in the series of vignettes in Appendix 14.

7.2.4 Careers guidance and other support mechanisms

Schools and teachers clearly play an important role in preparing pupils for making educational choices at the end of their lower secondary schooling. The main findings in this study relating to this were that (i) the actual process of providing that support and its purpose can have clear implications for pupils' perception of what it actually means to receive support, and (ii) that the pupils' perceptions of that support does not necessarily cohere with that of the school. In considering the formal structures in place for providing support and guidance, it is important to distinguish between the processes of making short term choices such as which school to attend, which course to apply for, and so forth, and between the longer term purposes of making such choices, that is, 'career development'. Pupil understanding of this distinction seems to stem from the way in which each school interprets and applies the formal guidelines issued by policy-makers. Thus pupil perception is dependent upon the context of their learning.

Although there was clearly a great deal of variation in the support recalled by the English pupils', and setting levels of satisfaction aside, they often referred to what might be considered to be aspects of a *strategy* or approach to careers guidance. This may result from the focus within the English system upon being prepared "…. for dealing with future decisions and transitions" (Ofsted, 2001:7). This contrasted with the Norwegian pupils who were dismissive of any support they received and referred solely to procedures for making choices which were implemented at the end of their final year in lower secondary school. Thus the English pupils referred more to career development whereas the Norwegian pupils referred to the administrative processes involved in making the transition into upper secondary education. Whereas the English pupils understood support as sources of information and careers lessons, the Norwegian pupils understood support to

be about guidance in making their final choices. Interestingly, pupils from neither country felt the school had been particularly supportive. This is discussed further below.

The pupils' understanding of support were compatible with the views expressed by the guidance counsellors; English counsellors referred more to a process beginning in the earlier years of lower secondary education whereas the Norwegian counsellors spoke of an incoherence between schools and what they planned to offer pupils. In addition, a report in Norway's foremost national paper, Aftenposten, also suggested that drop out rates in Norwegian upper secondary schools were related to poor advice concerning subject choices from guidance counsellors in their lower secondary schools (Sæeter & Enghaug, December 13th 2004:2). The English system, with the expectation of making a final choice, seemed to encourage pupils to be become more active in the decision-making process than those within the Norwegian system. The Norwegian pupils did not seem to feel a sense of urgency in their plans and instead saw the goal of their decision-making as related to their choice of school more than anything else. In fact, leaving one's options open was a goal in itself. Although the Norwegian counsellors who were interviewed felt the transition from lower secondary into upper secondary progressed smoothly for most, it was noted that pupils were not accustomed to decision-making. This need only be an issue of practice. Thus, even though 'support' may not be a crystallized event which pupils recall, the actual process can have very important and definite implications for the experience of decision-making which pupils must later become involved in.

Taveira and Moreno (2003) suggest that it is important that pupils become confident in career exploration, partly through learning to ask questions and partly by reflecting on their own behaviour. They need to learn their own strengths, weaknesses and preferences, and how to make decisions. Making plans can be difficult in current times when individuals must acknowledge that their futures are uncertain (Law, Meijers and Wijers, 2002). In fact, their plans must often incorporate flexibility in order to face unknown economic and social trends; this can be difficult for some. Seligman (1994) notes that many young people feel pressured to make one right career choice. They may feel they must commit themselves to a particular occupation in defining who they are and as a means of relieving anxieties about an uncertain future. "The perceived pressure for rapid decisions, in combination with the adolescents' shift of focus away from parental and authority figures and toward the peer group, may lead adolescents to devalue counsellors who seek to promote thought and self-exploration rather than quick solutions" (Seligman, 1994:273). It would seem, therefore, that the Norwegian approach of delaying choice may be more beneficial to individuals in our current time of changing careers, but that the English system is beneficial in terms of actually preparing pupils for making decisions.

In both countries pupils failed to recall the specific support of guidance counsellors in making their decisions. This may be because they did not recognise the range of activities counsellors can be involved in, for example, setting up presentations, making arrangements for open days, and so forth. Thus, support is only seen as support when it is provided on an individual basis. This conclusion was corroborated by the views of those guidance counsellors who were interviewed in Phase III of the study (Appendix 15). Since individual interviews are no longer available in England, and since schools in Norway do not necessarily offer them, this would suggest that many pupils feel unsupported in their choices and may not, therefore, be utilising a significant resource. Furthermore, it may be that pupils' understanding of the role of the counsellor may be inaccurate through a lack of contact with them. Pupils may expect direction and certainty in their advice when counsellors perceive their role as supporting a much broader decision-making process. This again draws attention to the possible confusion pupils have in making immediate and longer term decisions. In Norway, for example, several of the pupils complained at the lack of direction from the counsellors, some were confused at their role suggesting that the only support offered was 'the catalogue', and many also lacked long term plans in terms of their future education or career. Thus, for the Norwegians, the issue of choice in upper secondary education was about the short term. This certainly cohered with the views expressed by many pupils that they wished to postpone the decision-making process. It also contrasts with the English experience in which pupils were encouraged to make immediate choices in relation to their future educational/career plans. Although this suggests that the English focus is more upon career development and how immediate choices serve future goals, systems must be wary about focussing too heavily upon that goal – immediate choices need not be confined by long term plans.

That pupils and counsellors may perceive the role of support differently is corroborated by recent research; Millar and Brotherton (2001) found that pupils expected careers advisers to *tell* them about their opportunities and how to make their choices. They also found that the overall satisfaction of the pupils with the interview was mainly related to the interpersonal climate of the interview. "The issue of pupil involvement in the careers guidance process appears to constitute an important element in the findings. The findings here suggest that pupils' satisfaction is positively related to feeling involved and a participant in the actual process: taking some personal responsibility for their careers progress" (2001:106). These findings suggest that there are issues about the preparation of pupils for their careers interviews so that they share the same expectations of the purpose and roles as the adviser. Furthermore, given the relationship between satisfaction and the way in which the counsellor and pupil relate to each other, it would seem that building a greater sense of familiarity before the interview is necessary. Indeed, Howieson and Semple (1996) suggest that many pupils will not present themselves for interview even if they want one and this may be related to the extent to which they feel comfortable with the counsellor. This suggests that

counsellors need to ensure that they maintain a high profile in school in order to engage the agency of pupils in the decision-making process.

The role of the school is only one aspect of support. Other influences upon choices in young people include individual's interests and abilities, the school culture, pupil academic achievement, gender, race, socio-economic background, family, peers, the political, economic and cultural climate, national employment policies, public opinion, and the labour market (Wei-Yuan, 1998, Seligman, 1994, Taveira & Moreno, 2003). This study suggests that this list may be extended to include *cultural expectations* of educational pathways, *formal assessments*, *experience* within decision-making process, *family values* of education, and their *mother's direction* and encouragement. Importantly, these informal structures may serve to compensate for inadequacies within the formal structures of the school guidance system. Since such structures are less evident within the Norwegian system this might explain why so many pupils felt they were not supported in their choices. Even where the school was able to provide good provision in terms of support and guidance, pupils may have been insufficiently prepared in the broader sense of the term *support*. Furthermore, it may be that failing systems within the English system are masked by these additional informal structures.

To exemplify this argument, consider the typical Norwegian pupil – s/he is not forced into early decision-making by cultural expectations to finish their education and find a career most assessments are internal, and as discussed earlier in the next sub-section, do not appear to have the same impact upon self-esteem and motivation as the English external exams, there is less pressure at home to do well, perhaps because of the expectation that everyone will stay on in upper secondary education and, therefore, there is less pressure on families to utilise *cultural capital* in supporting their child's education, but, like the English pupils, a mother's support is the most important element of guidance received. Where pupils lack these informal structures they are inadequately supported in their choices.

This conclusion is further amplified by the findings related to pupils from non-Norwegian backgrounds who, for one reason or another, (see section 6.4.2); come to rely upon the school for support and as a result are marginalised in their choices. In many instances, this is because the mother lacks the ability to act as the key supporting figure as a result of their inexperience with the educational system or difficulties with the Norwegian language. Failures within the formal structures of the school system are exaggerated in situations where informal structures are unable to provide support. These conclusions are supported by the findings of Pugsley who, whilst noting the importance of mothers in offering support to their children, also suggested that marginalised working class parents relied on teachers to "'do the right thing'" (1998:78).

Research into the influences on career development and the actions of individual pupils suggests that pupil *identity* is a crucial element over and above many of the influences discussed above, although, arguably, many will contribute towards the formation of one's identity. Law, Meijers and Wijers (2002) suggest that individuals form identities based upon observing others, sifting information and classifying it. In this way, individuals create mental maps of what is similar and different to themselves and their experiences. The subjective experience becomes used in an objective way and this information becomes used as a background or terms of reference. Those who have difficulty with their identity may find it difficult to establish the career path they wish to follow early on. However, Seligman (1994) suggests that delaying planning may also be problematic since this can lead pupils to make hasty decisions when the educational system requires choices to be made.

Many researchers have pointed to the role of academic achievement in the development of individual identity, self-esteem and motivation. Individuals may experience difficulties in developing realistic and coherent career plans if they have a self-concept which incorporates poor academic success whereas those who have a strong academic background are more likely to have a higher self-esteem and will find it easier in planning and thinking about their future opportunities. Brooks (2003a) found that the influence of academic achievement in the development of identity emerged within the social context of peer relations. She examined the role of family and friends in making their higher education choices. In particular, she suggests that the development of a pupil's identity is fostered through comparisons with one's peers. She writes, "....almost all of the young people were aware of what they perceived to be their academic standing relative to their friends and peers and, for some, this positioning was of great importance (both for university entry and their own sense of identity)" (pg 290). These influences are subtle and may not be recognised by pupils themselves. Indeed, in this study, the role of friends was considered minimal in both countries even though teachers suggested to the contrary.

The importance of academic success upon pupil identity and future choices is supported in part by research in Norway. In May 2003, one of the national Norwegian newspapers addressed the issue of non-completion rates in upper secondary education (Holterman, 2003:4). The article suggested that around 5% of pupils drop out of upper secondary education each year and that only 57% of pupils finish their education in the planned three years (Statistical Office, 2001/2002). Various counties have set up projects to address this problem with suggestions that the reasons may be that pupils experience problems academically or socially (Ole Kristian Aakre, leader of *Inntakskontoret I Nordland*). Eifred Markussen of the Norwegian Institute for Studies of Research and Education found that many of those pupils who dropped out had exhibited clear signs of problems in the final year of their lower secondary schooling with poor attendance, worse than average grades, and a general sense of unhappiness with school. Furthermore, pupils opting for vocational courses were

more likely to drop out than academic pupils. Aakre suggests that the problem is unlikely to be related to pupils being forced into their second choice since 77% of those dropping out were studying on their first choice course. However, pupils with lower grades tend to opt for vocational courses and so it may be that such pupils have self-selected beforehand.

The role of academic success upon self-esteem and identity also proved to be important, particularly amongst the English pupils who seemed to internalise the judgements made by external examinations. Many of the pupils referred to how poor grades had had a significant impact upon them and how they perceived their future. It seems likely that at each stage in the education system pupils will fail to continue their education as a result of the feedback from assessments. Thus, even though the assessment process may have assisted some pupils in valuing their education from an early age and in realising the importance for early decision-making, it may have limited opportunities for others. Those pupils in this study may be those whose self-esteem and identity was relatively high since they were the pupils who had chosen to stay on in post-compulsory education.

The main findings from this study, in relation to support and guidance in choices for upper secondary education, are that pupils utilise a range of resources for making their decisions about their immediate choices, and for making choices in the long term. Although the educational systems, via schools, provide the most obvious source of guidance, other factors outside the school also prove to be crucial. A pupil's situation in relation to these many factors, including their personal identity, motivation, and self-esteem, will determine how they experience the support around them and the role they take in the choices they make. There have been a number of issues raised within this theme but, perhaps, the overriding concern, as with other sections, is that of pupil agency. Support clearly plays an important part in encouraging this but, at the end of lower secondary, or even in the final year, it may be too late to begin such a process. At this late stage, pupils' priorities are with immediate concerns and practical matters such as how close their choice of school is to their home. Support and guidance has to be about motivating pupils to become active and to engage in the planning process of their education early on. Choices and decision-making are not simply about that which lies ahead in the immediate future but how those immediate actions fall in line within a bigger picture. Only in taking this approach does it seem that pupils can master any control and make decisions which will be informed and satisfactory in the long term.

7.2.5 Comparative approaches to assessment

"Assessment is a central feature of social life. Passing judgement on people, on things, on ideas, on values is part of the process of making sense of reality and where we stand in any given situation" (Broadfoot, 1996:3). With regards to educational assessment, its key functions are that of selection, certification, and social control. In recent years, governments have also utilised it as a means of

ensuring the accountability of teachers and other educationalists in maintaining centrally set standards.

The issue of assessment played a significant role in this research project, particularly for the Norwegian pupils who experienced a great deal of dissatisfaction. On the surface, it would appear that the differential findings with regards to assessment are a distinction between internal and external assessment. In Norway, the pupils are assessed through a series of internally set and marked tests with the teacher utilising these to produce a final single grade. Each pupil will also sit external examinations in a limited number of subject areas, the results of which are given equal weighting to the internal grade and do not carry authority over the internal grade if there is a discrepancy. This system differs with the English examination process in which, on the whole, external examining bodies test pupils through one or two exams per subject area. The English pupils clearly felt the external process of examination was a more legitimate process of assessment than the Norwegian's did about internally set tests.

As already discussed, pupil choices are a combination of what they bring to the decision-making process themselves, and the constraints of the system. If pupils perceive their choices as restricted in some way by 'the system', for example, through unjust grading by teachers, then dissatisfaction will necessarily follow. Not only must they believe that the assessment will be instrumental in them achieving their goal, but they must also believe in the process as being a fair judgement of knowledge and skills. In this way, the population as a whole accepts that those who do well are genuinely more deserving of their better grades and, in turn, that those who do less well are really less capable. The reason for this is that, in many ways, achievement in assessments leads to rewards and benefits. Exam results at the end of compulsory schooling and at the end of upper secondary education, for example, can determine whether pupils gain entry to the next level of education and this, in turn, can affect access to particular careers and financial and social gains in society.

In Norway, it would seem that the pupils did not value the assessment process as providing them with an objective judgement of their ability. It may be that they were largely unaware of the measures taken by schools to ensure fair assessments are made and, consequently, they rely upon local knowledge and anecdotal stories to create a sense of justice in support of their own situation. Since much of the discussion within the interviews was concerned with differential marking between teachers and schools, it would seem that the problem with Norwegian assessment is not that it is internally marked but that the mechanisms for ensuring that it is standardized and legitimized are unstable. Since the assessment process is internally marked the process is not as mysterious and revered as if it was a secret external process. Pupils, therefore, have greater personal contact with those who cast the final judgement and this contact may mean that pupils lose

respect for the system. The lack of belief in the system, and its possible inconsistencies, was evidenced in the national newspapers in May 2003 when the Norwegian papers wrote of a case in which two pupils in their second year at an upper secondary school in Oslo, having been dissatisfied with the consistency in marking between their teachers, submitted the same history paper to two different teachers claiming it to be their own. The one pupil received a Grade 5 whilst the other received a Grade 3+. Once the school was aware of the pupils' actions the test paper was re-graded by the same teachers, plus a third, to a 3- (Nordby, 2003:2).

It would seem, therefore, that the difficulties experienced by the Norwegian pupils result from their doubts concerning the legitimacy of the assessment process. Whether such doubts are justified needs further exploration but, nevertheless, there was a widely held belief amongst the pupils that the system of selection was unjust because of the autonomy of teachers over their grades. Their concerns also appeared to be agitated by the use of assessment to grade punctuality and behaviour. This type of assessment led many of the pupils to doubt the ability of their teachers to make a judgement even though such an evaluation is very different to the marking of tests. Such experiences may, in fact, undermine the authority of teacher assessments. A further consideration is the role of the family versus the school in the development of pupil identity. There is some suggestion (Hamilton, 2002, MacBeath, 2006) that pupils' beliefs about their ability, often based upon school or institutional judgements, may be undermined if in contradiction with family perspectives. Since most Norwegian parents have experience of upper secondary education, this too, may impinge upon the pupils' perceptions of their ability and the assessment process.

Another issue for the Norwegian pupils was the use of the average grade or *gjennomsnitt* and how this is implemented within the selection process. Pupil's entry into upper secondary school is determined by their average grade in all subject areas. The idea of such a system is to encourage pupils to make an effort in all subject areas, thereby providing them with a broader curriculum. However, at the age of 16 and upwards, it may be that pupils need to specialise more and cannot succeed in all subject areas. Is it fair that crucial choices for their future are constrained by grades in subject areas they will 'drop' as soon as they possibly can? Furthermore, pupils may find themselves in schools they do not wish to attend or even on courses which they are not interested in as a result of their average performance. Again, this sense of injustice may fuel dissatisfaction with the assessment process even when the real issue is directed elsewhere. Pupils need not have much direct contact with this approach for it to impact upon their perceptions of the system. Concerns have been raised by some policy-makers in Norway and a new system is under review. In December 2004, Aftenposten, the main national newspaper in Norway, printed a story about the selection process for pupils in applying to upper secondary schools (Sæeter & Enghaug, 2004). The existing system is based solely upon grades whereas there are now plans to change this so that pupils within given catchment areas are prioritised. There has been some resistance to these new

proposals with Oslo's (not Norway's) Minister of Education, Torger Ødegaard saying, "It is tragic that we are ending a system where 70% of pupils have their first choice met" (translation). His report shows that the new system will give pupils from the centre and from the west of Oslo a free school choice because there are sufficient school places in schools in those parts of Oslo whereas in the east there is a shortage. Pupils in the eastern parts of Oslo, therefore, will be forced to compete even more fiercely on their grades than is currently the case.

Having found pupils' perceptions of internal assessment in Norway, and the various facets which contribute toward this view, to be a negative one, it is interesting to consider the impact of assessment within the English context. Many of the pupils spoke casually about the number of exams they were required to sit during their lower secondary years although few suggested this was a problematic issue. This may well be because it was an experience they were accustomed with or had come to expect. The level of assessment they received provided them with important feedback and, in a very positive sense, this seemed to indicate to pupils early on in their educational career, that their education was important and that early efforts had serious consequences for their future. This, in turn, provided support in the decision-making process at the age of 16. Pupils knew where their strengths lay and, in an educational system that encourages pupils to follow a limited number of subjects in upper secondary education, so they were able to utilise this knowledge to pursue those areas they excelled in. The problem with such a system is that pupils may stop making the effort in certain subject areas too soon. This raises the question of the age at which a broader curriculum ceases to be beneficial to both individuals and society as a whole. It is also questionable whether such a system was truly supportive of decision-making. Initial outcomes may show that all pupils were active in making a choice at the end of their schooling compared to Norwegian pupils but a longitudinal study would be necessary to establish whether pupils later felt they had made the correct choices.

The extent of the assessment process in England was very important in terms of pupil self-esteem and morale. Whilst the Norwegian pupils focused mainly upon friendships as being the most positive experience they could recall, English pupils often referred to good grades in lower secondary school or at the end of Year 12. Furthermore, the English often referred to disappointment in their exam performance as their most negative experience. Poor GCSE and AS grades were regularly reported as being a 'wake up call'. Research into the impact of the assessment process upon pupils corroborates these findings. Internalization of their grades over time can affect the way in which they judge their own ability and aptitudes. Labels such as 'bright' or 'less able' can impinge upon choices and how that individual plans for their future career. Hanson (2000) suggests that tests change people because they assign categories and people are then treated accordingly. They come to think of themselves according to the expectations of the category. Moreover, Cullingford suggests that assessments can have consequences for attitudes to

work - "Failure at exams, like any failure, is a painful experience, but by the time they leave school most pupils have had so much of it that they have had to learn to be pragmatic, to accept. Doing well or badly at exams is personal and social; it is like a judgement made public. For some it is not just a short shock or pleasure, but dominates their view of work" (1997:274).

The English pupils were very accepting of the judgement made of them through external assessment. Cullingford (1997) suggests that pupils do not interpret tests as traumatic because it is part of their 'competitive worlds'. They become involved in the process of comparing themselves with their peers, using the tests to create labels, and using them to monitor their ability in relation to others in their class rather than questioning the actual process. This apparent acceptance of the assessment process by the English pupils, in view of the Norwegian findings, may, however, reflect the way in which external assessment is portrayed in England. It is essentially a secret process in which the pupils do not participate. Awarding bodies adopt a series of procedures in working towards standardized marking. These procedures involve standardization meetings, exemplar answer booklets which are marked by the chief examiner, and monitoring of examiners' marking. Examiners meet to create 'communities of practice', groups which can discuss the marking of particular questions so that they develop a shared understanding of the knowledge they are looking for and the marks they will attribute to such performances.

Such a process contributes towards the creation of a belief in the objectivity of external assessments. In spite of this many researchers have pointed to its subjective nature (Broadfoot, 1996, Broadfoot, 2000b, Sanderson, 1997, Baird, Greatorex & Bell, 2004). Examiners can differ in their speed of reading, fatigue, competence, order and speed of marking, their personal situation, contextual factors, whether they find a particular writing style difficult to understand, the type of question tackled, or the experience of the examiner, all factors which have been shown to affect patterns in marking. "The growing challenge to modernist perspectives has led to a growing recognition that educational assessment needs to be seen as a social, as much as a scientific, activity and hence one that is deeply imbued with the bias and subjectivity inherent in any human interaction " (Broadfoot, 2000b:xi). Some researchers and educationalists argue in favour of internal assessment over external as a more objective process. Harlen (1994), for example, suggests that the belief in external assessments over internal stems from a focus on the marking of the task as opposed to the setting of the task. The advantage of internal assessments is that they can test a range of tasks given in a range of contexts thereby providing a fuller picture of individual ability and giving pupils various opportunities to prove themselves. With external tests, pupils must perform a limited number of tasks which are thought to sample their overall ability. Further, as Harlen suggests, internal assessments also promote broader learning and development of skills. This is in opposition to external assessments which encourage pupils to focus entirely on knowledge for the purpose of the exams rather than learning itself. This observation highlights the

way in which national assessment may simply be reflections of cultural and historical trends. Certainly, it coheres with the English essentialist notion of the curriculum and the Norwegian encyclopaedist view.

To conclude this section, it would seem that the differential access pupils have to the real social processes behind internal and external assessments elucidates, in part, the differential levels of satisfaction in English and Norwegian pupils; the Norwegians may be more realistic about the real mechanisms behind assessment because it is less of a secret process. Moreover, Norwegian pupils experience dissatisfaction with other related aspects of the educational system which are directly related to the assessment process. Their feelings and experiences with these may negatively influence their interpretation of the internal assessment. Furthermore, there are indications from the data that there are real issues in the standardization of the internal assessments which must be overcome in a system where performance in the tests are important for entry onto the next level of education and in a system in which grades and procedures are transparent.

For the English pupils, their experience with assessment shaped their way of thinking about themselves, their choices, and the assessment process itself. Within the context of this study this produced very positive results with higher levels of satisfaction and pupils being more active in the decision-making process. However, a word of caution needs to be aired; the findings of the follow-up study (Appendix 15) indicated that those pupils who did not achieve their planned course of action after upper secondary school accepted their failure and followed a less satisfactory path. This compares with the Norwegians where many had not achieved their goal up to two years after leaving school but still believed they would do so at some point in the future. Thus the English pupils may have accepted the judgement of their exam grades and allowed it to influence their decision-making. Furthermore, at a time when life long learning is to be promoted, it is essential that individuals are able to pursue a wide selection of knowledge and skills, to hold positive views of their abilities to achieve in a range of subject areas, to value learning for the sake of learning, and to foster a mindset that does not regard employment as the final goal of all decision-making. The English experience may seem brighter in this study but the long term benefits may be greater for the Norwegians.

7.3 Summary of Findings

This chapter has outlined the findings of the study in relation to the four research questions. The conclusions reached are briefly reiterated below:-

Understandings of *national policy*, its *implementation*, and *pupil perspectives*, were clearly shaped by the social and cultural context. Where there were shared policy goals or common decision-

making processes between England and Norway, these were translated into different outcomes as a result of different cultural traditions and practices. For example, both England and Norway aimed for increased participation, a coherent system, and breadth of curricular, whilst pupils in both countries focused upon common concerns such as their aspirations for the future. In spite of this the English pupils tended to be more active and to feel more supported in their decision-making than their Norwegian counterparts who were passive and focused upon their position within the system. Thus it was not enough to analyse any of the features of the study without considering it as intrinsically linked to the culture. At a more local level this was also evident with the influence of the institutional context clearly shaping the way pupils approached their choices. Finally, it was evident that pupils' engagement in the decision-making process and levels of satisfaction were dependent upon whether or not they were prepared for this process and whether or not they believed the opportunities available were real choices. This was important to all pupils but was most evidenced in ethnic-minority pupils in Norway and pupils from a lower socio-economic background in England where their levels of *cultural capital* were less apparent.

In addition to the research questions five themes were discussed. Three of these were directly related to the research questions (*the process of decision-making, choice and decision-making,* and *context and approaches to decision-making*) and are, therefore, covered by the summary above. The chapter contained discussion of two additional topics which arose through the analysis of the data. A summary of these is given below:-

- ***Careers guidance and other support mechanisms***

The nature of guidance in England and Norway was very different in several ways. The English system tended to focus more upon career development whilst the Norwegian system focused upon the administrative procedures involved in moving from lower secondary into upper secondary; the English system tended to be more personal whilst the Norwegian system was more automated; English pupils were generally more satisfied, Norwegian pupils generally dissatisfied; English pupils tended to be encouraged to plan for the future but also to focus upon the immediacy of making decisions towards that long term goal whereas Norwegian pupils were encouraged to delay their decision-making with the consequence that they may never gain the experience necessary for making good decisions or they maintained their options for a longer period of time. Similar findings related to the pupils' failure to recall the specific support of the guidance counsellors unless it had been provided on an individual basis which it frequently had not. Thus the success of the school's support was often judged against whether pupils were supported in other ways outside the school – family, friends, or other material resources.

- ***Comparative approaches to assessment***

The legitimacy of the examining process was an important feature with English pupils clearly believing in the 'objectivity' of the process more than the Norwegian pupils. This led to differential levels of satisfaction since it affected the pupils' perceptions of barriers to their goals – whether such difficulties were located within the individual or within the system. For the English pupils, any problems resulted from their lack of ability and this, in turn, affected their levels of self-esteem. The Norwegian pupils attributed their problems to the structure of the educational system and the examination process. Furthermore, the English pupils were assessed far more than the Norwegian pupils during the course of their educational career. The English pupils appeared to utilise this as a means of feedback which assisted in the decision-making process.

The following and final chapter (Chapter Eight) is specifically directed at establishing the most prominent areas of concern within the thesis, and in locating the findings within the context of policy and research.

Chapter Eight - Conclusions

This final chapter focuses upon drawing the study to a close. It begins with a summary of the whole thesis (section 8.1) followed by limitations to the research (8.2), consideration of what policy-makers might gain from the study and where future research in the area might best be directed (section 8.3), and concludes with a final statement regarding the findings (8.4).

8.1 Summary of thesis

The following section summarises the entire thesis with the intention of providing a coherent overview.

Rationale

This study is summarised in Chapter One as follows, "....concerned with pupils' perspectives about their experiences in upper secondary education as a means of examining the processes of decision-making and the influences of cultural experience upon these processes in order to inform policy development" (pg 34). The rationales for such a study were four-fold:-

- Pupils are key participants within the context of schooling; it is only fair that their views on aspects of the educational system, particularly those in which they are directly involved, are heard.
- Policy has often been seen to adopt a rational action/human capital approach which does not always reflect the real ways in which pupils live their lives and make their choices. There is a growing body of research about choice which criticises such an approach. It is clearly important to contribute further for an increased understanding of the mechanisms involved in decision-making.
- Upper secondary is a crucial stage in the educational system, creating the link between compulsory schooling and higher education or the world of work. It is important to understand the processes involved to inform policy-makers about issues of current concern such as personal development, life-long learning, sustained economic growth, and labour market trends.
- In recent years, comparative studies have been utilised by policy-makers to support the practise of policy-borrowing from other countries. The *context* of policy implementation is, therefore, largely ignored. It is important to contribute further to debates concerning this.

In responding to these four rationales, the following research questions were set:-

1. What are the stated aims and purposes of policy in upper secondary education in England and Norway and how are these achieved?

2. What are the decision-making experiences of pupils in upper secondary education in England and Norway concerned with educational and career choices, and what are the major similarities and differences between the two countries?

3. How do factors such as gender, race and class affect the experiences of pupils in upper secondary education in England and Norway, particularly in relation to choice and access?

4. To what extent are *national educational policy*, its *implementation* and *pupils' perspectives* socio-cultural constructs, and what might be learnt from contextualising upper secondary education?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study has been located within a socio-cultural framework, and in particular has drawn attention to *Cultural Historical Activity Theory*. Furthermore, Hedegaard's application of a series of inter-related theories has been considered as a useful tool for understanding the role that institutions play in mediating between society as a whole and individuals. These theories accounted for the cultural influences within the study. With regards to the process of decision-making, Hodkinson et al's (1996) model of *careership* was adopted. *Careership* and, indeed, Hedegaard's model, utilise the work of Bourdieu and his concept of *habitus* and thus, it too was considered a relevant part of the theoretical framework in this study. Furthermore, the impact of structural factors and identity upon decision-making were also discussed.

Methodology

The study involved a comparison of England and Norway, and was specifically located within the respective cities of Bristol and Oslo. Ten institutions were involved in the study, four from England and six from Norway. These were chosen on the basis of how representative they were of upper secondary institutions nationally, and also on the basis of whether or not they were located in a higher or lower socio-economic area. Within each school/college, approximately 25 pupils received and completed a questionnaire regarding their decision-making and the transition from lower secondary into upper secondary. Of these 25, approximately 7 pupils were selected for interview. Interview transcripts were analysed using the principles of 'grounded theory' whilst questionnaires were analysed using the statistical package SPSS. In addition to this data, the study relied on a number of policy documents and other resources which were discussed in Chapter Four.

Culture and Context

It has been argued that England and Norway are superficially similar but, largely as a result of different historical backgrounds, are quite different. The marketisation of education is but one

example of this. The differences were also shown to be evident in many aspects of the cultures, including the curriculum traditions of their educational systems. This chapter also outlined the structure of the educational systems, crucial in understanding the pupils' perspectives on the decision-making experiences, the upper secondary policy in England and Norway, both historically and currently, and the careers guidance service available in both countries.

Data – Questionnaire and Interview

The English and Norwegian data were analysed in several different ways. With regards to the questionnaire data, the pupils' *responses to the question items* were analysed using SPSS to establish the influence of key factors such as gender upon patterns of responding. Secondly, a factor analysis was carried out to establish *patterns in responding* which might highlight themes in the pupils' perceptions of their decision-making and the respective educational systems. With regards to the interview data, a typology of decision-making was established as a result of those utilised by the pupils. The key themes of individual context, support systems, equality of access, and the school context, were discussed separately and comparatively where appropriate.

Discussion

The findings from the analysis were that pupils do indeed adopt a pragmatic rational approach to their decision-making as outlined within the concept of *careership* and, in this sense, English and Norwegian pupils were similar. Central to this process, however, is the cultural and institutional context of the decision-making, and the nature of the choices available to pupils. Pupils' perspectives were shaped by their environment, but also whether or not they believed that their options were real and viable. Such factors create differences between the two countries. It also highlighted the possible impact of ethnicity and class as creating constraints upon opportunities.

Two additional themes emerged from the data, that of *support* and *assessment*. *Support* in England was focused more upon careers development whereas in Norway it was concerned more with administrative processes. Such differences were evident within the decision-making of the pupils. The *assessment* process in both countries had significant consequences for the pupils' perceptions. It impacted upon their acceptance of the grading system, levels of satisfaction, self-esteem, and also acted as a resource in the decision-making process.

8.2 Limitations to the study

Any study will be restricted by events or circumstances beyond the original design. In this regard, there are three specific points to be raised:-

- Comparability of samples
- Language issues
- Pupil expression

8.2.1 Comparability of samples

The design of this study, and the steps taken to ensure that the English and Norwegian samples were comparable, has been described in Chapter Three. It has been a study of upper secondary schooling, and in order to ensure that pupils in both countries had experienced all the choices and processes of decision-making on offer within their country, the study focused upon those pupils in the final year of their upper secondary education who were studying a course which would afford them the opportunity for continued education at university. The possible problem, with regard to limitations to the study, lies in the differential staying on rates of pupils in the two countries and the process of selection involved. This issue has been addressed within the selection of the samples (section 3.2.3) but it is worth re-considering it in order to stress the measures taken in establishing comparability.

In England, pupils are selected for Level 3 qualifications based upon their prior performance and thus, by the end of upper secondary school, this sifting process ensures that those who have remained within the system are the most academically successful. In Norway, however, the requirements for staying on are particularly low. In effect, this means that almost all pupils are entitled to enter upper secondary school even though there may be some limitations on which schools or courses they can apply to depending on their *gjennomsnitt*. With staying on rates being high this means that those pupils in the Norwegian sample may represent a more diverse academic group than in the English sample. Following due consideration of the available data, the study was designed in such a way that comparability was established. If it had not, however, it might have explained the apparent polarisation of success and failure stories in Norway compared to England since the pupils could have been a less homogeneous group from the start.

In order to establish whether or not the two samples are comparable we need to know the percentage of pupils *entering the final year of a course which, upon successful completion, will give them the opportunity to enter higher education.* Thus this is essentially an issue of academic ability. We do not have such data but using the data which is available we can make the argument that the two samples are of an equivalent educational standard. There are three points to be raised:-

Defining 'Staying On'

One of the problems in establishing comparability of the samples is that one must rely on national statistics which are, on the whole, not intended for comparison with another country. Consequently, the task of finding and understanding appropriate data can be a difficult one. This is

particularly evident when considering staying on rates in England and Norway. It is important for us to establish whether or not the Norwegian staying on rate is genuinely far greater than the English. The statistics utilised in this study (see Chapter Three, table 1) showed that staying on rates in Norway were 96.2% compared with 72.4% in England. It is not clear, however, whether the staying on rates in England should include education *and* training which would raise the English staying on figure to 87.1%. Such a figure would not be as markedly different from the Norwegian.

Staying on vs Completion

Staying on rates refer to those who *continue* their education beyond the age of 16 but not to those who *complete* their studies. This means that even though there are higher staying on rates in Norway, this says nothing of what happens to the pupils during the course of their studies. This is important given that the pupils in this study were interviewed at the very end of their upper secondary education. The data available shows that 51.8% of 19 year olds in England in 2003 attained a Level 3 qualification whereas the figure was 47% in Norway (pers com Sadiq Kwesi Boateng, Consultant, *Statistisk Sentralbyrå*, 26-10-04). Thus, very many more pupils begin upper secondary education within Norway but a comparable number within England successfully complete at a level which will allow them to enter higher education. The difference is not in terms of achievement of a Level 3 qualification but the *opportunity* to study in the first place. This would suggest that staying on rates at Level 3 are not, in fact, higher in Norway than in England. It is not possible, however, to assume that the samples are entirely comparable at the point at which the pupils participated in the study since, even though they were at the end of their studies, they had not *completed* their exams.

Level 3 (access to higher education)

All pupils in the Norwegian sample were studying courses which would permit them to enter higher education and, therefore, they were not the least able candidates within upper secondary education. This is corroborated by data published in *Kurstilbud videregående opplæring i Oslo 2002/3* which stipulates the lowest grade of those pupils admitted in the previous academic year. Of all the courses in this study, the lowest average grade was typically higher than Grade 3. Thus most pupils were far from being the least academic.

This discussion has focused upon the possibility that the staying on rates in England and Norway may not be as disparate as first presented; that completion rates in England and Norway are similar; and that the standard of education of pupils in this study are likely to have been similar. Although at first glance it would seem, intuitively, that the English were a far more elitist group than the Norwegians, it is important to recognise that the higher staying on rates in Norway include figures which are not included in the English definition of staying on, that the figure says nothing of levels of achievement, and that those who participated in the study were those who would go on to study

in higher education. Thus, the Norwegian participants, like the English, were the most academically successful. It is not possible to state conclusively that the two samples are comparable but following careful efforts in the design of the study it has been concluded that it is reasonable to suggest they are.

8.2.2 Language issues

The demands of a comparative study in which England and Norway are compared require some competence in Norwegian as well as English. With regard to my language skills they are, perhaps, best described through the following examples – it would be possible for me to converse on an individual basis but not amongst a group, it would be possible for me to read a tabloid but not a broadsheet. Thus there were limitations in what I could communicate to others and in the information I could access.

In terms of communication, this was not a particular problem and, indeed, it was important to ascertain this to be the case in the pilot studies. Norwegians begin to learn English when they are 8 years of age and by the time they are at the end of their schooling most will have reached a reasonable standard of spoken English. This was evident in the number of pupils who were confidently able to be interviewed in English, having problems only with individual words or phrases, and in particular, terms that related directly to the educational system. In only three interviews (two pupils and one school representative) did the issue of language arise to the extent that the interview had to be conducted in both languages – the respondent answering in Norwegian whilst the questions were asked in English. Assistance was sought from a native Norwegian in the transcription process to ensure no specific details were lost. Written Norwegian was also not a problem since I had all the necessary documents (the letter of introduction, the ethical code and the questionnaire) translated for me.

The greatest problem was in reading official Norwegian documents and this created a specific limitation in access to information. In particular, this related to national policies which are written in *ny norsk*, the form of Norwegian devised more recently to reflect the dialects of the country. It is more typical, as is the case with my knowledge, that foreigners learn only *bokmål*, the form of the language based upon Danish as a result of Norway's historic connection with Denmark. This restriction meant that I was particularly dependent upon books written about Norwegian policy and those policies which the Norwegian ministry (KUF) had translated into English, either on one of the educational websites, or in educational brochures. Indeed, Payne (2002b) also notes his reliance upon KUF official documents and OECD observation reports as a result of Norway having received little attention for international research purposes. For the purposes of this study, there was a sufficient but not extensive range of such documents.

8.2.3 Pupil Expression

The issue of pupil expression as a limitation is raised as a cautionary point. The pupils in this study represented the diversity of personalities that would be expected of any large group of individuals. Of course, in having different personalities, it also meant that pupils experienced the same issues in different ways, and indeed, questioning this was a key element of the study. It is also true to say, however, that some pupils voiced their opinions more vehemently than others. If one is to hear only those who shout the loudest then this can create an inherent bias within the data. This was a particular concern in the analysis of the Norwegian pupils' responses and interviews were re-checked on several occasions with this concern in mind. Furthermore, in order to offset the possible skewing of results, a Norwegian teacher read the relevant sections within this thesis and confirmed that the findings cohered with his experiences; it has, therefore, been assumed that the conclusions are not based upon a minority perspective.

8.3 The way forward....

Having reached the conclusion of this study, it is now an appropriate point to consider the way forward - for policy-makers in both England and Norway, for future research issues, and to reflect upon the contribution of the study to comparative education in terms of employing a methodology which is sensitive to the context of the research.

8.3.1 for Policy-makers

The purpose of the study was largely to advise policy-makers in an effort to create a more informed approach to pupil decision-making in upper secondary education. There was an additional concern with policy borrowing from other cultures but this is discussed further below (section 8.3.2.2). This section concentrates upon topic-related factors, both country-specific, and in more general terms.

8.3.1.1 Country-specific: England

A particular concern within the English education system is staying on rates at 16 and, although this was not directly addressed in this study as a result of focusing on the most able and motivated pupils, there is something to be said as a result of the comparison with Norway. The Norwegian system was particularly coherent with very little choice in terms of qualifications. Thus pupils were not faced with confusion at a potentially vulnerable time in their educational careers. Furthermore, parental knowledge of the upper secondary system was particularly supportive for Norwegian pupils. In England, the range of available options can be somewhat overwhelming, particularly within further education colleges – a "plethora of idiosyncratic provision" (Stanton & Richardson, 1997:11). Much has been done to streamline the system since this statement was made but for many this continues to be the impression. It may be that encouraging families to make contact with

those who do have experience of the system or mentors might be helpful. It is unwise, however, to focus only on those individuals who are disaffected by school. There may be many young people who wish to stay on after 16, but expressing a desire to do so should not mean that outside agencies such as Connexions no longer target them. It is important to maintain the support process throughout upper secondary schooling, particularly for those who are eager but unsupported sufficiently at home.

A further issue with regard to staying on is that many pupils lack a pathway from lower secondary to upper secondary and on into higher education, a finding which corresponds with the work of Broadfoot et al (2000) and Osborn et al (2002). Both were involved in comparative studies of pupil perspectives in England, Denmark and France. Whilst the former study focused upon primary-age children, and the latter, secondary-age, both touched upon the issue of a clearer ladder of progress through the French system. This may relate to similar issues to those raised above. The entire system must appear coherent; it must adopt similar processes so that pupils perceive transition points as simply steps forward rather than something very different. This would coincide with issues of life long learning and the adoption of skills which are integrated into a lifestyle rather than simply adopted 'whilst at school'. It would also encourage pupils to delay decision-making and to overcome the typical perception within England that an individual must start earning money at the earliest opportunity. Such problems may be overcome with current reforms in England. At this point it should be noted, however, that the English pupils appeared to benefit from the opportunity to choose to stay on. Although these pupils were those who actually had a choice, perhaps unlike those who did not stay on, it is important for policy-makers to understand that mass upper secondary schooling may not be the answer for all pupils. Whilst efforts are made to overcome youth unemployment and other related problems, it is important not to devalue English individualism by focusing only upon the outcome rather than the process. Indeed, Hodkinson and Bloomer (2001) discuss the misguided consequences of encouraging pupils to stay on and the well-thought out decision-making of pupils involved in dropping-out of upper secondary schooling, whilst Huddleston and Unwin (1997) refer to a range of situations in which pupils have continued their education for the 'wrong' reasons including peer pressure, insecurities about leaving, teacher persuasion, and a lack of choice in labour market opportunities. Mass upper secondary education is not necessarily appropriate for everyone.

This study does not stand alone when it raises concerns about the assessment process in England. The pupils' self-esteem rested heavily upon their grades and for some it was a crucial point in their schooling. Pupil identity was often shaped by their exam results at the end of their lower secondary schooling or mid-way through their upper secondary education. This was at a time when identity-development was particularly vulnerable and at a point when many other, arguably more important, aspects of their lives were shaping their perceptions of themselves and those around them. The

frequent assessment of pupils throughout their school lives seemed to have led pupils to place great store by such a process. Furthermore, the assessment process is often external and nationwide with teachers often placing pressures on pupils to work towards their exams. Pupils cannot fail to become embroiled in this process but it may be at a cost. Though some assessment is necessary, it creates constraints upon knowledge, methods of learning, and upon individual agency. Indeed, Broadfoot and Black (2004) question whether assessment actually reinforces "outmoded notions of curriculum content" and, instead, suggest that it should be used to help pupils become 'self-aware' and able to 'map their own pathways', a view also held by Gipps (2002).

A final note should be raised with regards to higher education. There were two particular concerns for the pupils, both seemingly related to those from less advantaged backgrounds. Firstly, that A levels were more highly valued by universities and that for those who were studying vocational subjects, there were worries about choice and access. Whether or not such limitations really exist (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003, found no evidence of bias in university selection) is irrelevant. The issue is whether the misconception results in reduced applicants for courses 'traditionally' aimed at A level candidates. What Forsyth and Furlong did find was that middle class pupils tended to apply to 'red brick' universities whilst pupils from manual backgrounds were more likely to attend further education colleges, and that pupils from middle class families were more likely to receive unconditional offers early on in the application process, and were more likely to achieve higher grades in their compulsory schooling. There are, therefore, many related factors which might confuse the underlying issue when the pupils in this study expressed concerns about selection-bias.

Secondly, student loans were problematic for many pupils. This was particularly the case for those whose family background had limited resources and no knowledge or experience of higher education. In their study, Forsyth and Furlong (2003) note that financial changes in the structure of higher education impinged most heavily upon disadvantaged young people. Adnett (2006), also notes that, whilst it is possible to prove statistically that economic benefits remain for pupils in higher education even with the additional costs of student loans, poorly informed pupils who are highly averse to debt and risk may be deterred from applying. It may be that changing *family* perceptions in a very pragmatic way may go some way to overcoming such problems. Indeed, Ahier (2000) and Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005) note that decisions about a pupil's future will involve a discussion with the family and part of this will be about the particular financial costs of which choice is made. Many of those interviewed in this study were applying to local universities so that they could continue to live with their parents in order to minimise such costs. Regardless of whether a particular government decides to implement student loans or not, their presentation to different families and the process of repayment, needs to be reviewed to guard against structural inequalities. This may not alter differential class priorities but it may allay fears that exist amongst

the very many who are willing and able to enter higher education but who are overwhelmed by the "financial burden".

8.3.1.2 Country-specific: Norway

The message for Norwegian policy-makers is somewhat problematic. Already the upper secondary system in Norway has been established for many years and the attitude of the pupils towards staying on is generally positive. It would not be useful to suggest that many pupils would be better placed choosing an alternative route. No politician would wish to undo a system which, on the whole, works well. The key to further developments, therefore, is in making improvements; addressing the needs of those for whom the system does not work. The selection process and support system in Norway serves to limit the choices of those on the fringes of the system, most notably those from an ethnic-minority background. All pupils, however, would benefit from a system that focuses upon decision-making and prepares pupils for their future.

In Norway, careers education is presented as a cross-curricular activity included within the social science and Norwegian classes. It does not, however, appear to be as fully developed as the new English model and is criticised by the OECD (2002) for its limited availability in lower secondary schooling. This compares with an OECD (2003) country file concerned with UK policy which notes that a structured framework, quality standards, policy advice, and obligations on the part of the providers all help create a system in which pupils are supported in their plans and decision-making. Furthermore, all schools are required to have an accessible careers library. The report goes on to suggest that "There is a need to ensure that, particularly for young people who are at the threshold of life-long learning, careers guidance retains a strong and independent identity" (2003:25). Thus the notion of learning beyond the traditional period of time, does not mean that pupils can neglect the development of decision-making skills. Though pupils in Norway need not make many decisions in upper secondary schooling, this does not mean that one does not need to know *how* to make a decision. Indeed, Plug, Zeijl and Du Bois-Reymond (2003) suggest that there is an emergent need for young people to develop 'life-management' skills and the ability to choose from multiple opportunities. It is a skill which Norwegian policy-makers should focus upon. Furthermore, as suggested by Ofsted (2001), how well pupils are prepared for dealing with future decisions and transitions cannot be measured by the number of pupils who have found work or further education upon leaving school. Policy-makers must take decisive action in this regard.

Policy-makers in Oslo have begun to address the selection process since the data was originally collected with the re-introduction of catchment areas. However, this is not entirely problem-free since there are a greater number of upper secondary schools in the West where the middle class families are located, and fewer in the East where the lower class and ethnic-minority families live.

Where there is competition for places, pupils continue to battle it out through their *gjennomsnitt.* Policy-makers also need to consider the contexts for learning created in applying such a selection process.

The *gjennomsnitt* appears to be a central feature of the Norwegian assessment process but it also seems to be one of the most problematic aspects amongst the findings in this study. That pupils must do well across a large number of subjects, places a great deal of pressure upon individuals. It is this regulation which limits the possibilities for the less able since they are unable to focus on simply that which they are interested in or in which they are most able. It further raises a broader issue – pupils are very much governed by external regulations. It appears to be a rule-driven society with all citizens expected to study the same subjects for a specified number of years. Yet it may be that policy-makers need to question whether it is appropriate to constrain young adults to such an extent and to stifle those areas of the curriculum in which they can excel by overloading them with subject-areas they would rather leave behind at the age of 16.

The constraints which shape pupil decision-making created a great deal of dissatisfaction for the Norwegian pupils. Amongst their concerns was the issue of assessment. There was a commonly held belief that standards across the schools of Oslo were defined within the school and even to the class in which they were studying. This view was held by the teachers as well as the pupils. Where this problems lies is unclear, be it from a lack of national guidelines, limited external testing, or the freedom of individual teachers in the assessment process. Regardless of its source, it is crucial that policy-makers address the views of those within the educational system. The legitimacy of the value-system upon which a society operates is of critical importance.

8.3.1.3 General conclusions

Whilst the discussion thus far has been divided by country, there are some issues which policy-makers in both England and Norway should consider. These relate to the overriding concerns within the study – decision-making, choice, opportunity, agency, and context.

Policy-makers are in a situation whereby they must meet societal and individual needs at the same time. It may seem that these are contradictory but this need not be the case. If policy-makers can pay attention to studies such as this one in which the actual processes of decision-making are emphasised, it should be possible to adopt a system in which pupils actively move through the system in harmony with both their own personal goals and with the needs of the society as a whole. Society and its members are not, after all, unrelated. Thus implementing policies based upon misunderstandings of pupil processes such as human capital theory are largely a waste of time and

unfulfilling for all concerned. The practicalities of life, for example, may be more important than the goal of a high salary and a prestigious career.

The argument for a better understanding of decision-making and pupil choices may also be made for a better understanding of context and culture. It is important to consider the *selection* process and ensure that this is a system which simply helps in the allocation process of pupils to different schools and courses rather than an *exclusion* process. Policy-makers need to question how pupils are brought together and the type of learning contexts they wish to create. What are pupil priorities and how do pupil and school perceptions become interwoven?

How an educational system determines who should enter the next level of study is an interesting and important issue, one that is well presented in comparing England and Norway. One wonders at the high numbers of pupils who drop out or do not complete their studies in Norway in relation to the high numbers who stay on. Is it better to pre-select via stricter entrance requirements as in England, thereby risking the exclusion of those who may have succeeded, based upon a single assessment *event*? Or is it better to give everyone an opportunity to succeed for longer but allow very many to experience the *pathway* of failure? That equivalent numbers of pupils in England and Norway achieve an education at Level 3, and indeed Level 4 (higher education), would suggest that neither solution has a particular impact upon achievement per se. Ultimately, therefore, the 'right' way must rest more with the pupil experience and, therefore, policy-makers cannot neglect their perspective.

Finally, policy-makers must not underestimate the importance of the role of choice in facilitating pupil agency. To participate within their education, to think about their futures and to develop positive attitudes towards learning, to become active citizens; these are all consequences of providing real opportunities for *all* persons in a society; a view supported by Brooks (2003b). Pupils will only engage within the system if they are encouraged to evaluate and judge what is on offer, but also to believe that they can fulfil their dreams and that the system will not hold them back. Francis (2002), for example, in looking at gender issues relating to subject choices and career plans found that changes in the labour market affected pupils' aspirations for the future and what they believed to be viable choices. In this research project, it was found that to withhold such choices, be it through a lack of opportunity or through practical possibilities, breeds passivity at a time when policy-makers are looking for initiative and flexibility in young people. So what is the way forward? Brooks (1998) suggests that, in practical terms, policy-makers need to work on more than one level given the numerous differential needs of young people, whilst Lumby and Wilson (2003) argue that a coherent range of options can only be provided if policy-makers focus upon local environments.

8.3.2 for Research

This final section outlines the research implications which arise from the study.

8.3.2.1 Research Issues

There are a number of areas in which the findings from this research could be further explored. Firstly, the topic of decision-making is an interesting and valuable concern. As noted in Chapter One, too little emphasis has been placed upon the views of pupils themselves and their real lived experiences. A number of researchers have begun to explore these issues, but there has been very little focus upon the transition into upper secondary education. In particular, the impact of structural factors such as gender, race, and class are almost entirely within the realm of higher education. Furthermore, there is very little comparative work. Thus the message is that the topic needs to be more fully researched, and across a wider spectrum of countries. In so doing, it would clarify further the specific elements of the education system which impinge most heavily upon pupils' decisions and their perspectives of this process.

The impact of ethnicity and class are not entirely clear and a study which focuses more explicitly upon these influences might elicit more conclusive findings. This relates very much to the impact of parental support and is related to family values, experience with the education system, and access to information or more broadly, the view that "... choice systems privilege certain sorts of families and disadvantage others" (Gewirtz et al, 1995:22). All these factors would be of interest in establishing methods of raising standards and giving pupils a better position in the decision-making process later in their educational careers. This also relates to the need for a broader definition of support and guidance within policy.

Assessment in England and Norway proved to be a particular issue for the pupils in the study. Of particular interest was the differential way in which the pupils utilised the assessment process as a form of feedback and means of making choices. This was one of the factors which contributed to the English pupils being better-prepared in their decision-making. The question arises, however, as to whether the apparent positive effect of assessment within England is real or not. Who wins in the long term, the English or the Norwegians? The influence of identity upon decision-making and perspectives has already been raised, and likewise, the impact of assessment upon identity. It may be that pupils do not need to make critical choices at 16 and that levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction are not reliable indicators of whether decisions are 'good' or 'bad'. Perhaps the Norwegians were frustrated with the system available to them but, at the same time, they may develop skills and have opportunities available to them which, in the long term, will serve them better. It may be that English pupils are limited by making early choices and having their

aspirations curtailed at a point in their lives when their identities are forming. These issues need further consideration.

Finally, an area of concern which arose in the study was that of pupil perceptions of equality of opportunity. The English pupils raised concerns with regard to the experiences of less able pupils whilst the Norwegian pupils expressed frustrations about their own personal experiences. Thus the term 'fairer' was understood in terms of the 'other' by the English and in terms of 'self' by the Norwegians. Since efforts were made to ensure that both samples were comparable in the level of ability, it is important to establish other causes of these differential findings. Could it be that the Norwegian system, in fact, catered more to the needs of the less able? Possibly because of the excessive assessment and the GCSE 'gateway' into upper secondary education, the focus on the less able is more apparent at an earlier age in England. Without further research specifically targeted at such concerns, it is not possible to surmise their cause.

8.3.2.2 Methodology

As noted in Chapter One, uncritical policy-borrowing can be an erroneous endeavour since it can lead to the application of policies in settings very different to those in which they were originally developed and the local environments in which they succeed. As noted previously, a growing body of researchers have been paying particular attention to the importance of context within their work, adopting theoretical frameworks sensitive to culture and implementing methods which avoid inherent biases which may result from ignorance of the context (Alexander, 2000, Osborn et al, 2003, Crossley, 2000, Broadfoot, 2000a). It was against this background that this study was placed with the aim of contributing further to such an approach.

In the first place, the study was located within a socio-cultural framework. This meant that the pupils' perspectives were intrinsically linked with the environment within which they were living their lives. Secondly, the pilot studies afforded the opportunity to become fully accustomed with the cultures and the educational systems before the final criteria for the study were set. This familiarity with the two countries was crucial, not only in the collection of the data, but also in understanding it during analysis. Further still, it involved working closely with a native Norwegian throughout, particularly in ensuring equivalence in all aspects of the methodology (Osborn et al, 2003). Another factor was the importance of establishing a cultural distance from that with which one is most familiar; it is important to be aware of one's assumptions (see section 1.5). Thus every effort has been made within this study to employ context-sensitive procedures.

With regard to policy-borrowing, there is much to be learned from other cultures but the process of implementation should not be about transplanting the policy in its entirety, or even in part. What is

more appropriate is to comparatively evaluate the implementation of differential policies within their home contexts such that key issues are established. Indeed, with regard to England and Norway, Payne writes, "....the geographical, economic, social, political and cultural differences between England and Norway are so great as to render the search for straightforward policy lessons particularly problematic" (2002a:120). This does not mean, however, that any comparison should be instantly abandoned. For example, in this thesis the issue of support in Norway has been raised. That is not to say that Norway should adopt the English model of careers guidance but that the differential experiences of the pupils are utilised as a starting point for further policy-development, instigated by the English experience, but developed and implemented in Norway by Norwegians. Comparison, when applied appropriately, is a wonderful tool. In her work 'The tyranny of the international horse race', Brown notes, ".... we necessarily and constantly compare in order to make choices and to judge where we stand in relation to others and to our own past" (1998:26). It is important, however, to recognise that comparison of policies and their implementation has its limitations and any findings are culture-bound. What this study has contributed, apart from adding to the aforementioned body of research, is information about the influence of context upon perceptions. This clearly reinforces arguments made by others; policies are developed and implemented by people, people who neither think nor act in a vacuum.

8.4 A Final Comment

We have seen throughout this study that the post-compulsory phase of education is particularly prone to policy concerns for a more educated workforce, an emphasis upon life-long learning, individuals who are flexible and able to re-train themselves as the demands of the labour market change, and concerns with the need to ensure a competitive economy in the future. At the same time, we see the complicated picture in which policy-makers strive to merge these economic goals with individual personal needs. The specific creation of citizens for future societies is more than simply related to skills but is a reflection of a particular culture; the traditions, the beliefs, the way of living their lives (Bruner, 1996). Such concerns, however, are driven by the humanity of people rather than external impersonal market trends. By focusing upon individual decision-making in the final year of upper secondary schooling, this study has established a point in time when the importance of these competing demands are heightened; internationally-led economic imperatives, human concerns with equality, citizens within a given culture, and the individual rights of young adults. What we see are the possible tensions between these elements; the individual vs society, the international vs the national, the child in the pupil vs the adult.

For the pupils in this study agency meant very different things. As already discussed, there were particular issues with ethnicity, class, school context and national context. Individual pupils, some more than others, were in a particularly vulnerable place. Set in the midst of these tensions they

were trying to carve out a pathway for their future. Thus to believe that individuals have free choice, the ability to make decisions, to meander freely through their educational career, is idealistic. There are pressures upon pupils and these were felt. Moreover, their very way of understanding the world was constrained by the very same contexts which created their opportunities – it was impossible to fully step out of oneself, to perceive the world objectively, though some tried. What defined them as a person was their actual situation. The choices and opportunities were as much a part of their context, as their context was about the decisions they made. As Gewirtz et al note, "…. Choice is thoroughly social, it is a process powerfully informed by the lives people lead and their biographies" (1995:24). This hazy picture is captured by Bourdieu in his concept of *habitus*. Hedegaard's (1999, 2001) model is also particularly useful at this point (see section 2.4.4); the role of the individual is in the *intention* to act.

The overriding message from this thesis is simple; though pupils are agents in their decision-making, they are also bound by their context. In this sense, their agency is at the mercy of those who are able to influence societal change. It is not enough to provide equal opportunities and create a system where policy statements speak of freedom of access. As we have seen, real choice and real opportunity are very different things. Current literature concerned with decision-making stresses the need for policy-makers to better understand the real lived experiences of pupils and their decision-making but this is not enough. There must be a greater acknowledgement of the actual thoughts which are constructed in making those decisions and the contexts for decision-making. Individuals are only individuals as far as contextual boundaries will permit. To end with a particularly apt quote, I refer to Evans' study of young adults in England and Germany and their experiences of control and agency in differing socio-economic environments.

> Young people are social actors in a social landscape. How they perceive the horizons depends on where they stand in the landscape and where their journey takes them. Where they go depends on the pathways they perceive, choose, stumble across or clear for themselves, the terrain and the elements they encounter. Their progress depends on how well they are equipped, the help they can call on when they need it, whether they go alone or together and who their fellow travellers are. If policies and interventions are to be made effective, we need to sharpen our awareness of the interplay of structural forces and individual's attempts to control their lives (2002:265).

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Norwegian Structural Factors

Although the available resources concerning decision-making within Norway were limited, it is possible to give an impression of Norwegian society and to draw attention to more general points concerning structural factors as a supplement to the discussion in Chapter Two. These are discussed below under the headings 'gender', 'class' and 'race'.

Gender

There are two important factors in considering gender roles within Norway. Firstly, the country's agricultural history led to the importance of the home and family. This meant that women had a comparatively strong role, particularly set against few male-dominated institutions (Holter, 1993). Secondly, Norwegians adhere to the idea of gender equality although it remains unequal, particularly within economic spheres. Holter writes, "Norwegians still live in a culture based on 'patriarchal premises', and the Norwegian economy especially cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called egalitarian" (1993:157). A national report by KUF noted "Reports show that Norwegian schools work with gender equity issues to a modest extent" (2002). Furthermore, in a study of gender roles within Norway, Holter found that couples tended to recognise that, as a unit, they faired better if they prioritised the male employment situation, but in return, men tended to allow women to dominate within the home. In spite of the suggestion that Norway remains a male-dominated society, he did find that, compared with other countries including the English-speaking nations, the Nordic countries tended to be more egalitarian in their attitudes to equal rights' questions in both family and working life.

Class

The notion of class is not a straightforward or obvious issue within Norway. Again, this results from historic traditions. Holter notes, "Norway was never a feudal country – or at least never a fully feudalized country. The "vertical" feudal order with authoritarian relations from top to bottom of society never really became part of the social fabric of daily life" (1993:150). Indeed, Norwegians farms were typically self-owning and self-governing. This is not to say that a class system did not, or does not, exist within Norway. Holter suggests that the three key classes are the urban middle class, the urban working class, and the rural class. The middle class culture has now spread with the vast majority of the society adhering to values associated with individual freedoms although the other classes remain with a less obvious place in society. Such a change in society may also result form the comprehensive welfare system which supports the country.

Race

Norwegians believe they are "....tolerant, moral and righteous members of the international community" (Woon, 1993:186). There are some indications when considering issues relating to ethnicity where this perspective may be questioned. Norway's experience with ethnic-minorities

was, historically, with the Sami people. Until the late 1950s the Samis had been strongly stigmatised and many attempted to disguise their ethnicity as a result of this. Since the 1980s real efforts have been made to reverse this policy.

A more recent concern has been to do with immigrants from other countries, and in particular, non-Western, non-European cultures. Hylland Eriksen notes, "The idea of Norwegianess, as it is produced and reproduced in public discourse, seems incompatible with Islam" (1993:31). Indeed, a ban was introduced on immigration in 1975 with family reunification and asylum seeking being the key grounds for entry since then. Woon (1993) suggests that political debates about race tend to be polarized, focusing upon either the reduction of immigrant rights or upon the challenges experienced by those adjusting to a new life in Norway. Either way, he suggests that the debates are "unfruitful" since no common ground is ever found. He argues that many immigrants experience institutional discrimination even where it is unintentional. "Normal routines, procedures and rules covering all aspects of daily life can function as structural barriers to immigrants" (1993:190). He goes on to suggest that in the long term there will be real issues for the socio-economic status of immigrants if the issue of racial discrimination, particularly in the employment sector, is not fully addressed. That such inequalities are evident within the education system are borne out by findings of a conflict between the rights of pupils to receive apprenticeship training and the rights of enterprises to select their apprentices (KUF, 2002).

Conclusion

From the discussion above it would seem that Norwegian society adheres to an egalitarian approach within debates surrounding gender and class even if not always in practice. However, it appears to struggle with issues pertaining to race. The dominant group within Norwegian society remains the white, middle class, male.

Appendix 2 – Upper Secondary questionnaire

Upper Secondary Pupil Questionnaire

Winter 2002/Spring 2003

Write your name and date of birth in the following boxes:

NAME

DATE OF BIRTH

Are you Male ○ or Female ○ ? (please tick one of the circles)

Write the name of your school in this box:

What course/s and subjects are you studying, (eg, A level Maths, GNVQ Business)?

Will you finish this qualification this academic year? _____

The questions which follow are about yourself and your experience as a pupil in upper secondary education, that is, your schooling *since you were 16.* This will give you the opportunity to share your views and opinions about your education, and your plans for the future.

Your answers are very important to me. It should take you approximately 15 minutes to finish the questionnaire and I hope you enjoy it.

Thank you for your help.

Part 1: Please express an opinion to the following statements by ticking one of the circles beneath the responses 'Strongly agree', 'Agree', 'Disagree' and 'Strongly disagree'.

Please read the questions carefully as they may not be worded in a way that you expect.

	Strongly agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly disagree*
1. My earlier education has been a good basis for my current studies.	o	o	o	o
2. My initial choices in upper secondary were influenced by my GCSE grades.	o	o	o	o
3. On the whole, I think my GCSE results reflect my true ability.	o	o	o	o
4. I think the educational system is only fair to those who have good grades.	o	o	o	o
5. I think my current studies are very difficult compared to my previous education.	o	o	o	o
6. Practical matters such as travel expenses influenced my choices about where to study.	o	o	o	o
7. What my parents wanted me to study influenced my choices.	o	o	o	o
8. I have never considered dropping out of upper secondary education.	o	o	o	o
9. I only stay in upper secondary education because there is nothing else for me to do.	o	o	o	o
10. On the whole, I am glad that I decided to continue my education.	o	o	o	o
11. In making my choices, I received all the support from my teachers that I needed.	o	o	o	o
12. I am happy with the options that have been available to me since I finished my GCSEs.	o	o	o	o
13. I feel that I am an important and valued part of this school.	o	o	o	o

	Strongly agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly disagree*
14. I think that I gain more from what I learn outside school than I gain from inside it.	o	o	o	o
15. When I do leave school, I will not be sad to go.	o	o	o	o
16. Academic and vocational courses have the same status.	o	o	o	o
17. Lots of my closest friends left school after their GCSEs.	o	o	o	o
18. I feel pressured to do well at school.	o	o	o	o
19. I think the government is doing a lot to help people after they have finished their GCSEs.	o	o	o	o
20. Upper secondary education is very important if I am to get a job in the future.	o	o	o	o
21. The main purpose of upper secondary education is to prepare pupils for university.	o	o	o	o
22. I do not think upper secondary really helps me to develop as a person.	o	o	o	o
23. I don't regret any of the choices I've made since my finishing my GCSEs.	o	o	o	o
24. I do not have that much time before I need to think about my future career plans.	o	o	o	o
25. I have plans for the future.	o	o	o	o

26. What plans do you have for your future? _____

_____

_____

27. If there is anything else about your education that you would like to comment upon, please use the space below.

Cont'd....

Part 2: This section asks for information about yourself, where you live, and your family. The reason for asking these questions is so that I can see how people with different lifestyles might have different opinions. Any information given is completely confidential. If you feel uncomfortable about answering any of these questions please leave them blank. If you do not know the answer to a question, please write "don't know".

28. What type of accommodation do you live in, eg, house, flat? _____

29. Is your home rented or privately owned? _____

30. Who do you live with, eg, mother, father, step-brother? _____

_____

31. How many brothers or sisters do you have? Please give their ages, eg, sister 12 yrs.

_____

32. How many of your brothers/sisters have had an upper secondary education? _____

33. If you have brothers or sisters who have studied in upper secondary, what did they study?

_____

34. What have your brothers or sisters been doing since they left school?

_____

35. Does your mother have a job? Yes o No o

What is the title of this job? _____

What type of things does she do in her job? _____

Did your mother study at upper secondary or a higher level, and if so, what did she study? _____

36. Does your father have a job? Yes o No o

What is the title of this job? _____

What type of things does he do in his job? _____

Did your father study at upper secondary or a higher level, and if so, what did he study? _____

37. What is your nationality (eg, English, Norwegian)? _____

What is your ethnic origin (eg, White, mixed White/Asian, Afro-Carribean)? _____

38. Would you be happy for me to contact you about your answers? Yes o No o

Appendix 3 – College questionnaire

College Student Questionnaire

Winter 2002/Spring 2003

Write your name and date of birth in the following boxes:

NAME

DATE OF BIRTH

Are you Male o or Female o ? (please tick one of the circles)

Write the name of your college in this box:

What course/s and subjects are you studying, (eg, A level Maths, GNVQ Business)?

Will you finish this qualification this academic year? _____

The questions which follow are about yourself and your experience as a student *since you were 16.* This will give you the opportunity to share your views and opinions about your education, and your plans for the future.

Your answers are very important to me. It should take you approximately 15 minutes to finish the questionnaire and I hope you enjoy it.

Thank you for your help.

Part 1: Please express an opinion to the following statements by ticking one of the circles beneath the responses 'Strongly agree', 'Agree', 'Disagree' and 'Strongly disagree'.

Please read the questions carefully as they may not be worded in a way that you expect.

	Strongly agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly disagree*
1. My earlier education has been a good basis for my current studies.	o	o	o	o
2. My initial choices in college were influenced by my GCSE grades.	o	o	o	o
3. On the whole, I think my GCSE results reflect my true ability.	o	o	o	o
4. I think the educational system is only fair to those who have good grades.	o	o	o	o
5. I think my current studies are very difficult compared to my previous education.	o	o	o	o
6. Practical matters such as travel expenses influenced my choices about where to study.	o	o	o	o
7. What my parents wanted me to study influenced my choices.	o	o	o	o
8. I have never considered dropping out of college .	o	o	o	o
9. I only stay in college because there is nothing else for me to do.	o	o	o	o
10. On the whole, I am glad that I decided to continue my education.	o	o	o	o
11. In making my choices, I received all the support from my teachers that I needed.	o	o	o	o
12. I am happy with the options that have been available to me since I finished my GCSEs.	o	o	o	o
13. I feel that I am an important and valued part of this college.	o	o	o	o

	Strongly agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly disagree*
14. I think that I gain more from what I learn outside college than I gain from inside it.	o	o	o	o
15. When I do leave college, I will not be sad to go.	o	o	o	o
16. Academic and vocational courses have the same status.	o	o	o	o
17. Lots of my closest friends left school after their GCSEs.	o	o	o	o
18. I feel pressured to do well at college.	o	o	o	o
19. I think the government is doing a lot to help people after they have finished their GCSEs.	o	o	o	o
20. College education is very important if I am to get a job in the future.	o	o	o	o
21. The main purpose of college education is to prepare pupils for university.	o	o	o	o
22. I do not think college really helps me to develop as a person.	o	o	o	o
23. I don't regret any of the choices I've made since finishing my GCSEs.	o	o	o	o
24. I do not have that much time before I need to think about my future career plans.	o	o	o	o
25. I have plans for the future.	o	o	o	o

26. What plans do you have for your future? _____

_____

_____

27. If there is anything else about your education that you would like to comment upon, please use the space below.

Cont'd....

Part 2: This section asks for information about yourself, where you live, and your family. The reason for asking these questions is so that I can see how people with different lifestyles might have different opinions. Any information given is completely confidential. If you feel uncomfortable about answering any of these questions please leave them blank. If you do not know the answer to a question, please write "don't know".

28. What type of accommodation do you live in, eg, house, flat? _____

29. Is your home rented or privately owned? _____

30. Who do you live with, eg, mother, father, step-brother? _____

_____

31. How many brothers or sisters do you have? Please give their ages, eg, sister 12 yrs.

_____

32. How many of your brothers/sisters continued their education after their GCSEs?____

33. If you have brothers or sisters who have studied in upper secondary school or college, what did they study?

_____

34. What have your brothers or sisters been doing since they left school?

_____

35. Does your mother have a job? Yes o No o

What is the title of this job? _____

What type of things does she do in her job? _____

Did your mother study at upper secondary/college or a higher level, and if so, what did she study? _____

36. Does your father have a job? Yes o No o

What is the title of this job? _____

What type of things does he do in his job? _____

Did your father study at upper secondary/college or a higher level, and if so, what did he study? _____

37. What is your nationality (eg, English, Norwegian)? _____

What is your ethnic origin (eg, White, mixed White/Asian, Afro-Carribean)? _____

38. Would you be happy for me to contact you about your answers? Yes o No o

Appendix 4 – Videregående Skole Spørreskjema

Videregående skole Spørreskjema for elever

Høst 2002/vår 2003

Skriv navn og fødselsdato i rutene nedenfor.

NAVN

FØDSELSDATO

Er du mann o eller kvinne o ? (sett en hake i riktig sirkel)

Skriv navnet på skolen din her:

Hvilke kurs/fag studerer du, (f.eks. matematikk fordypning, elektro)?

_____

Fullfører du videregående skole dette skoleåret? _____

De følgende spørsmålene handler om deg selv og dine erfaringer som elev i videregående skole, dvs din skolegang *fra 16 år og oppover*. Dette vil gi deg muligheten til å belyse dine synspunkter og meninger om utdannelsen din, og planene dine for fremtiden.

Svarene dine er veldig viktige for meg. Det skulle ta deg ca 15 minutter å gå igjennom spørreskjemaet - jeg håper du vil like det.

Takk for hjelpen.

Del 1: Uttrykk din mening om de følgende uttalelsene ved å sette en hake i en av sirklene ved siden av, under "Sterkt enig", "Enig", "Uening" eller "Sterkt uenig".

Les spørsmålene nøye, de kan være annerledes uttrykt enn hva du hadde ventet deg.

	Sterkt enig	*Enig*	*Uenig*	*Sterkt uenig*
1. Min tidligere skolegang utgjør et godt grunnlag for min nåværende skolegang.	o	o	o	o
2. Mitt valg av videregående utdannelse var påvirket av karakterene jeg fikk på ungdomsskolen.	o	o	o	o
3. I det store og hele, så tror jeg at ungdomsskolekarakterene mine gir et sant bilde av mine ferdigheter.	o	o	o	o
4. Jeg synes at utdanningssystemet bare tilgodeser de som har gode karakterer.	o	o	o	o
5. Jeg synes at videregående er veldig vanskelig i forhold til min tidligere skolegang.	o	o	o	o
6. Praktiske forhold som f.eks. reiseutgifter hadde betydning for mitt valg av skole.	o	o	o	o
7. Mine foreldres ønsker om min utdannelse påvirket valgene mine.	o	o	o	o
8. Jeg har aldri tenkt på å slutte videregående før jeg er ferdig.	o	o	o	o
9. Jeg fortsetter videregående kun fordi det ikke er noe annet jeg kan gjøre.	o	o	o	o
10. I det store og hele er jeg glad for at jeg bestemte meg for å fortsette med skolegang.	o	o	o	o
11. Jeg har fått all støtte som jeg trengte fra lærerne mine for å gjøre mine valg.	o	o	o	o
12. Jeg er fornøyd med valgmulighetene som jeg har hatt siden ungdsomsskolen.	o	o	o	o
13. Jeg føler at jeg er en viktig og verdsatt del av denne skolen.	o	o	o	o
14. Jeg tror at jeg får mer igjen for det jeg lærer utenfor skolen enn det jeg lærer på skolen .	o	o	o	o

	Sterkt enig	*Enig*	*Uenig*	*Sterkt uenig*
15. Jeg gruer meg ikke til å bli ferdig med skolen.	o	o	o	o
16. Allmennfag og yrkesfag har samme status.	o	o	o	o
17. Mange av mine nærmeste venner sluttet på skolen etter ungdomsskolen.	o	o	o	o
18. Jeg føler det som et press at jeg må gjøre det bra på skolen.	o	o	o	o
19. Jeg synes staten gjør mye for å hjelpe folk etter at de er ferdige med ungdomsskolen.	o	o	o	o
20. Videregående skole er veldig viktig hvis jeg skal få arbeid i fremtiden.	o	o	o	o
21. Hovedsaken med videregående skole er å forberede elevene på universitets- eller høyskoleutdannelse.	o	o	o	o
22. Jeg tror egentlig ikke at videregående skole hjelper meg til å utvikle meg som person.	o	o	o	o
23. Jeg angrer ikke på noen av valgene jeg har gjort siden ungdomsskolen.	o	o	o	o
24. Det er ikke lenge til jeg må begynne å tenke på fremtidig jobbkarriere.	o	o	o	o
25. Jeg har planer for fremtiden	o	o	o	o

26. Hvilke planer har du for fremtiden? _____

_____

_____

27. Hvis du har flere kommentarer om skolegangen din kan du skrive dem her.

Fortsettes

Del 2: I denne delen dreier spørsmålene seg om deg, hvor du bor, og om familien din. Disse spørsmålene stilles for å se om mennesker med ulike livsstiler kanskje har ulike meninger. All informasjon du gir er helt konfidensiell. Hvis det er spørsmål du ikke føler deg komfortabel med å svare på, så ikke skriv i svarfeltet. Hvis du ikke vet svaret på et spørsmål, skriv "vet ikke".

28. Hvilken boligtype bor du i, f.eks. rekkehus, leilighet? _____

29. Er boligen eiet eller leiet? _____

30. Hvem bor du sammen med, f.eks. mor, far, stebror? _____

_____

31. Hvor mange brødre eller søstre har du? Oppgi alder, f.eks. søster 12 år.

_____

32. Hvor mange av søsknene dine har gått på videregående skole? _____

33. Hvis du har søsken som har gått på videregående skole, hvilke kurs/fag tok de?

_____

34. Hva har søsknene dine gjort siden de sluttet skolen?

_____

35. Har moren din en jobb? Ja o Nei o

Hvilken jobbtittel har hun? _____

Hva gjør hun i denne jobben? _____

Har moren din tatt videregående eller høyere utdannelse? _____

36. Har faren din en jobb? Ja o Nei o

Hvilken jobbtittel har han? _____

Hva gjør han i denne jobben? _____

Har faren din tatt videregående eller høyere utdannelse? _____

37. Hva er nasjonaliteten din (f.eks. norsk, engelsk)? _____

Hva er din etniske opprinnelse (f.eks. hvit, hvit/asiatisk, afrikansk)? _____

38. Kan jeg kontakte deg for å diskutere svarene dine? Ja o Nei o

Appendix 5 – Upper Secondary Interview Schedule

Upper Secondary Interview Schedule

Key Questions	Prompts
1a. Thinking back over your education, before you began upper secondary, what did you enjoy most about school?	
b. (And least enjoy?) c. (What type of things did you feel you were good at/less good in terms of your subjects?) d. (What subjects have you chosen now?)	
2. Again, thinking about your time before upper secondary, did you think your education was important?	why?
3. You've told me about your education in lower secondary, can you now describe to me the process of moving into upper secondary school, for example, when that process began, why you made the decision to stay on, how you chose what to study, and so forth?	motivation/influences education vs work *choice* of institution *choice* of subject *choice* of course opportunities exam grades previous schooling earlier experiences difficulties
4. Can you tell me about the type of support and advice you received from the people around you before you made your decisions?	friends/family expectations range of options influence of grades teachers/counsellors information other institutions

Key Questions **Prompts**

5a. So you are now in the final year of (upper secondary/college/videregående) at (institution name). Are you happy with the choices you have made?

b. (Is there anything you would have done differently?)
c. (Do you think there is anything particularly fair/unfair about the educational system?)

evaluate
feelings about:-
institution
course/subjects
workload/level
teachers/friends
opportunities created
gender differences

6a. Thinking back over the past few years, can you tell me about the most negative (learning) experience you've had, perhaps in upper secondary school, or it might have been earlier?

b. (Can you also tell me about the most positive experience you have had?)

7a. If we try and think about you in five years time, looking back at yourself now, what do you think you will say that you will have gained from your upper secondary education?

b. (Is there one factor which is the most important?)

personally
employment

8. Is there anything which could have made your experience here better?

9a. One of the factors many pupils are thinking about at this stage in their education is their future work situation. What do you think potential employers will be looking for in young people?

b. (How do you think you gain this from upper secondary?)
c. (What do you think others view as your strengths and weaknesses?)

skills/knowledge
learning/character
extra activities

Key Questions **Prompts**

10. Many pupils have some idea about what they think upper secondary will be like and what they'll get out of it, do you feel it is what you expected it to be?

compare to lower
changed perceptions

11a. Can you tell me what plans you have for the future?

b. (Is upper secondary a crucial part of these plans?)
c. (What happens if things don't work out as planned?)

ambitions
pressures
facilities
next stage

12a. Thinking less about qualifications and work and more about you as a person, how do you think you have developed and changed these last few years?

b. (Do you think being in upper secondary has contributed to this?)

values
significant incidents

13. Can you tell me about the type of things that you do when you are not in school?

extra curricular
work - good exp?
expenditure

14. Finally, if you were in a position where a younger person, for example, a 14 year old, wanted advice about their future and they didn't really know whether to study, what to study, what path they should take, and so on, what kind of advice could you give them?

15. Is there anything else that you think I should know about your education that I haven't already asked?

16. Question related to issues raised in questionnaire specific to particular participant.

17. Do you have any questions which you would like to ask me?

18. Would you be happy for me to contact you again, say in a year, to see what choices and decisions you have made?

Appendix 6 – School Representative Interview Schedule

School Representative Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me about your school, for example, what is its ethos and how is it organised?

2a. What do you feel is the value of upper secondary education?

b. (How well do you feel it prepares pupils for future employment or further studies in higher education?)
c. (How do pupils gain from upper secondary education personally?)

3. How do you encourage pupils to choose to stay on after lower secondary?

4a. Which schools do your pupils generally come from?

b. (Where do they go to when they leave your school?)

5a. What are the attitudes and expectations of pupils when they begin their upper secondary education?

b. (How does this change over time?)

6. What is the process of decision-making, for example, when are pupils first asked to begin thinking about their education and the need to make choices?

7. Which curriculum areas are the most popular and why do you think this is?

8. What factors influence the choices pupils make about their future education, for example, whether to stay on, whether to look for work, which school, which subjects, and so forth?

9. What is the level of support offered to pupils, both inside school and at home?

10. What are the entry requirements for the different courses?

11a. How high are completion and drop-out rates?

b. (Why do pupils drop out?)

12. How does government policy impact upon your school practice?

13. What is your experience of the tension between academic and vocational courses?

14. How do you ensure choice and access for pupils from a range of abilities and backgrounds?

15. How does your school function in the broader context, that is, in co-operation with other schools?

16. Finally, is there anything else that you think I should know about that we haven't already discussed?

17. Do you have any questions which you would like to ask me?

18. I wonder if you have any school documentation which you would be able to give me, for example, a prospectus or any policies relevant to my study?

Appendix 7 – Bristol University's Ethical Code

The Graduate School's Ethical Framework for Research
(an abbreviated version)

1. Responsibilities to the field

- Educational researchers must not fabricate, falsify or misrepresent authorship, evidence, data, findings, or conclusions.

- Educational researchers must not knowingly or negligently use their professional roles for fraudulent purposes.

- Educational researchers should honestly and fully disclose their qualifications and limitations when providing professional opinions to the public, to government agencies, and others who may avail themselves of expertise in educational research.

2. Research populations, educational institutions and the public

- Participants, or their guardians, in research study have the right to be informed about the likely risks involved in the research and of potential consequences for participants, and to give their informed consent before participating in research. Educational researchers should communicate the aims of the investigation as well as possible to informants and participants (and their guardians), and appropriate representatives of institutions, and keep them updated about any significant changes in the research programme.

- Honesty should characterise the relationship between researchers and participants and appropriate institutional representatives.

- Educational researchers should be sensitive to any locally established institutional policies or guidelines for conducting research.

- Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, unless otherwise constrained by their official capacities or roles.

- Educational researchers should exercise caution to ensure that there is no exploitation for personal gain of research populations or of institutional settings of research. Educational researchers should not use their influence over subordinates, students, or others to compel them to participate in research.

- Researchers have a responsibility to be mindful of culture, religious, gender, and other significant differences within the research population in the planning, conduct, and reporting of their research.

- Informants and participants have a right to remain anonymous. This right should be respected when no clear understanding to the contrary has been reached. Researchers are responsible for taking appropriate precautions to protect the confidentiality of both participants and data. Those being studied should be made aware of the capacities of the various data-gathering technologies to be used in the investigation so that they can

make an informed decision about their participation. It should also be made clear to informants and participants that despite every effort made to preserve it, anonymity may be compromised. Secondary researchers should respect and maintain the anonymity established by primary researchers.

3. Guiding standards: sponsors, policy-makers and other users of research

- The data and results of a research study belong to the researchers who designed and conducted the study, unless specific contractual arrangements have been made with respect to either or both the data and results.

- Educational researchers are free to interpret and publish their findings without censorship or approval from individuals or organisations, including sponsors, funding agencies, participants, colleagues, supervisors, or administrators. This understanding should be conveyed to research subjects and other participants as part of the responsibility to secure informed consent.

- Researchers conducting sponsored research should retain the right to publish the findings under their own names.

Appendix 8 – Norwegian translation of Ethical Code

Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, England

Avdelingens etiske rammeverk for forskning (forkortet versjon)

1. Ansvar overfor faget

- Pedagogiske forskere må ikke fabrikere, forfalske eller gi misvisende informasjon om forfatterskap, evidens, data, funn eller konklusjoner.
- Pedagogiske forskere må ikke med overlegg eller uaktsomhet benytte sin profesjonelle rolle i falske hensikter.
- Pedagogiske forskere bør åpent og ærlig opplyse om sine kvalifikasjoner og begrensninger når de fremmer sine profesjonelt funderte meninger til offentligheten, offentlige institusjoner eller andre som ikke selv besitter ekspertise innen pedagogisk forskning.

2. Forskningspopulasjoner, utdanningsinstitusjoner og offentligheten

- Deltakere i et forskningsstudium, eller deltageres foresatte, har krav på informasjon om sannsynlig risiko involvert i studiet og om potensielle konsekvenser for deltakere, og at deres godkjenning basert på slik informasjon må gis før deltaking i studiet.
- Forholdet mellom forskere og deltakere og representanter for aktuelle institusjoner bør kjennetegnes ved ærlighet.
- Pedagogiske forskere bør vise varsomhet overfor lokalt etablerte institusjonelle retningslinjer for forskning.
- Deltakere har til enhver tid rett til å trekke seg fra studiet, med mindre deres offisielle stilling eller rolle forhindrer dem.
- Pedagogiske forskere bør vise aktsomhet for å besørge at det ikke forekommer noen utnyttelse til personlig vinning av forskningspopulasjoner eller institusjoner som deltar i studiet. Pedagogiske forskere bør ikke benytte sin innflytelse overfor underordnede, studenter eller andre til å presse dem til deltakelse i studiet.
- Forskere plikter å være oppmerksom overfor kultur, religion, kjønn og andre signifikante forskjeller innenfor forskningspopulasjonen under planlegging, gjennomføring og rapportering av studiet.
- Informanter og deltakere har rett til å forbli anonyme. Denne rettigheten bør respekteres hvis det ikke eksisterer klar enighet om det motsatte. Forskere har ansvar for å ta forhåndsregler for å sikre konfidensialitet for deltakere og data. Deltakere bør opplyses om hvilke muligheter som ligger i de forskjellige datainnsamlignsteknologiene som benyttes i undersøkelsen, slik at de kan treffe en velfundert avgjørelse om sin egen deltaking. Det bør også gjøres klart for informanter og deltakere at til tross for alle bestrebelser for å bevare deres anonymitet, så kan denne komme til å bli kompromittert. Sekundære forskere bør respektere og bevare anonymitet som er etablert av primære forskere.

3. Retningslinjer: Sponsorer, byråkrater og andre brukere av forskningsresultater

- Data og resultater fra et forskningsstudium tilhører forskerne som tilrettela og gjennomførte studiet, med mindre det er inngått kontrakt med hensyn til data eller resultater eller begge.
- Pedagogiske forskere kan fritt tolke og publisere sine funn uten sensur eller godkjennelse fra personer eller organisasjoner, inkludert sponsorer, bevilgende myndigheter eller institusjoner, deltakere, kolleger, overordnede eller administratorer. En slik forståelse bør meddeles forskningssubjekter og andre deltakere som del av forskerens ansvarlighet for å sikre deltakelse basert på informasjon om risiko og konsekvenser.
- Forskere som gjennomfører sponset forskning bør beholde retten til å publisere sine funn under eget navn.

Appendix 9 - School Contexts

Ten institutions participated in this research project, four within Bristol and six within Oslo. Each was selected because it contributed uniquely to the study, whilst also conforming to specific criteria, that is, whether it offered vocational or academic courses, and whether it was located in a 'higher' or 'lower' socio-economic area (see section 3.2.2). The following description provides further information about each institution – first, by contextualising the school (*researcher impressions)* and secondly, by giving an outline of what is on offer in terms of qualifications, subject areas and facilities for other areas of development (*prospectus information*). The latter source of information varied greatly between countries and between institutions with those in England placing a greater emphasis upon the need to market their courses. In Norway, most information was gathered via school websites and the catalogue, *Kurstilbud videregående opplæring i Oslo 2002/3* (Upper secondary courses on offer in Oslo 2002/3), in which each school was allocated a page or two to provide details of the courses they offered.

England

School A – Eddington School

This school is situated in the northern outskirts of Bristol in a rural and fairly wealthy area. It is a modern building, built in 1972, but steeped in over 400 years of history as a co-educational grammar school. Now with a comprehensive in-take it teaches 1,400 pupils. Although most of these live in the surrounding areas, the school also draws pupils from other parts of Bristol. 94% of pupils continue their education post-16, the vast majority doing so at **Eddington**.

Researcher impressions: Although the school appeared to be a fairly modern building, it was clearly immersed in history with shields and photographs in the reception. Walking into the foyer one immediately sensed this was a large and busy school with pupils everywhere - all wearing blazers although not all adhering to a *strict* dress code.

All visitors were greeted by two pupils from the lower school who enquired about your business, gave you a badge and asked you to sign in. They also dealt with other pupils who were sick and were waiting in the reception, and received the attendance registers. The administrative staff were located in an office situated immediately to the left of the foyer and, therefore, the pupils were not a replacement for this but more a filtering process. It seemed to work well and felt very positive to be welcomed in this way.

On each visit, there was a sense of the size of the school, always very busy with pupils moving between the various buildings. Staff conversed with each other or made comments as they passed in the corridors, the staffroom was full and noisy during breaks and, whilst there were administrative hiccups with some of my visits, these were resolved without issue. The school felt

as though it was a machine, but one that was working effectively, even though there were serious management problems in that the head teacher and a member of the senior management team were leaving the school and no satisfactory replacements had been found.

Prospectus Information: The sixth form is mainly involved in teaching academic subjects, that is, A levels, but does offer AVCEs in some subjects which may be studied as 3, 6, or 12 unit awards. These qualifications may be studied in *'art and design'*, *'business, travel and tourism'* and *'ICT'*. There are 24 academic courses to be studied including *maths*, the *natural sciences, languages, psychology, religious studies, sport studies,* and *theatre studies*. The three English examining bodies are used (AQA, OCR, and EDEXCEL) to provide pupils with the widest possible choice. In 2002 there were 331 entries for A levels with a 94% pass rate. 77% of pupils went onto higher education.

The sixth form curriculum involves more than those subjects outlined above. In addition to *Key Skills*, pupils are expected to follow a course in *General Studies*, and all pupils are taught typing and basic keyboarding skills. **Eddington** also emphasises the need for social development - "Although some form of citizenship is valuable in its own right, certainly employers and admissions tutors value this aspect of a student's CV" (Eddington School Sixth Form Prospectus, 2003). Pupils are, therefore, encouraged to participate in community-based activities and each year a Christmas event is arranged as a means of raising money for local pensioners. Activities in the local area such as Young Enterprise, a mock United National Assembly, Global Young Leaders, and even a trip to London where pupils debate issues about the Commonwealth are also promoted, and all pupils in the first year of upper secondary participate in an annual orienteering competition. Pupils are also expected to undertake some form of school-based duty such as befriending a younger pupil or taking on the responsibility of being School Captain and arranging the School Ball and the Leaver's Dinner.

Pupils are encouraged to develop their skills further through the extensive range of clubs on offer. These include art and photography, chess, drama and theatre, maths games, bands in brass and strings, as well as choir. Sports facilities are available for 11 different types of sports including athletics, basketball, and cricket.

The school provides a range of support for pupils. There are *Personal and Social Education* sessions which cover guidance in higher education, student finance, and health issues, and *Careers Guidance* which looks at work and opportunities in further and higher education, and training. Pupils also have access to IT resources which provide information about possible options following school including the programmes GAP Year, Youth For Britain, ECCTIS (Higher Education courses), Which Uni?, and Discourse (career selection programme). The school provides all pupils

with a booklet outlining the process of higher education and leavers information which outlines support services and the clearing process. Finally, an *Individual Tutorial System* oversees pupil progress and requires pupils to plan and set targets for their own development. Half-termly reports assist in the monitoring process.

School B – Stepleigh School

Stepleigh, educating 11-18 year olds, is located in the east of Bristol in a lower socio-economic area. It is situated off the ring road, but for anyone relying on public transport, it would be a long trek across the city. Although it provides some vocational options, the school is essentially concerned with providing an academic education.

Researcher Impressions: It took a long time to find the school, partly because of its location in the city, and partly because the school seemed to be tucked away in a residential area. It was located in a relatively new building and seemed to be a typical secondary school in appearance with several different blocks. A large foyer entrance displayed art work and the sound of pupils practising for a musical concert could be heard. Pupils also received visitors and escorted them to their destination.

The interviews were conducted in the office of the head of sixth form who was extremely helpful throughout. This was a small room where staff and pupils clearly entered freely for advice. All sixth form lessons were taught in that location and there was also a sixth form common room with vending machines; this seemed to be a well-used venue. The careers facilities were also located in the sixth form building but this was not for use by members of the lower school.

The school felt pleasant and busy and there was the distinct impression that every effort was being made to encourage pupils to remain in upper secondary education whatever their grades.

Prospectus Information: Those qualifications on offer are mainly AS/A2 courses and pupils are required to have five GCSEs of grade C or above, and an A or B in the subjects which they choose to study in upper secondary. All pupils are encouraged to stay on and most will also be advised to pursue four AS options which they can narrow down to three A2 in their second year. There is also the possibility to re-sit failed or low grade GCSEs in English and Maths. In addition, pupils follow a programme in *Key Skills* and *General Studies*. In light of this workload pupils are warned that homework, a social life, and part-time work can often be impossible to balance.

Subjects offered at this level are the *natural sciences* and *maths, languages, social sciences, arts,* and *humanities,* plus *ICT* and *media studies.* Those pupils wishing to pursue a vocational qualification may study the AVCE '*travel and tourism*', and those wishing to seek employment or later study a vocational course can follow a one year '*upgrade programme*' in which they can re-sit

their GCSEs and develop work-related skills such as preparing a CV and attending an interview. Pass rates for the year 2001/2 were 92% with 54% of pupils achieving grades A-C in their A2 levels.

The school is also part of the Stepwood Post 16 Partnership, along with seven other institutions in the area (six schools and one centre from **Brookfield College**). In total this partnership educates 750 students, giving them access to 50 GCSE, GNVQ, AS, AVCE and A2 courses. Students will typically use their existing school as a base but attend courses in other schools if there are clashes in the timetable with the options they wish to study, or if their school does not provide the course they are interested in. Having said this, staff liaison involves the development of the 'Level 3 matrix', based upon the provisional applications of pupils, such that any number of subject combinations are possible. The partnership means that, in addition to those subjects listed above, **Stepleigh** students have access to *geology, law, music technology* and *psychology*. As the 'Stepwood Partnership Post 16 Prospectus' 2003-4 notes, "Many students agonise over the choice between staying at school with the teachers and friends they know or to begin to break out by joining another school or college. The Stepwood Partnership offers you the best of both worlds" (pg 1).

In addition to studies, the school encourages pupils to become involved in other activities such as sports, music, theatre, and participating within the community including gaining work experience or raising money for charities. Pupils are supported in all their school involvement by individual tutors who monitor their progress. It is intended as a two-way exchange in which any number of issues can be discussed including study skills, higher education options and applications, interview skills, money matters, employment, and living away from home.

School C – Brookfield College

Brookfield College is a large institution with 40,000 students attending courses in eight sites across Bristol thereby making it impossible to attribute it with higher or lower socio-economic status. The sites vary greatly in what courses and facilities are on offer. This largely reflects historical developments with some sites representing existing community centres and others being more recent and aimed at attracting students based upon ease of access and image. The two sites involved in this study were those which offered academic as well as vocational courses, one being the original site of the college (**Wipton campus**), and the other being the newest and most modern building (**City campus**), first opened in 2000.

Researcher Impressions: Of the many sites where it might have been possible to collect data, only two sites were visited. Although it was not planned in this way, these were the oldest and newest in terms of age of the buildings. This made for a very different 'feel' to the two sites. The older site had several apparently derelict parts to it and the decor was shabby in many areas. It seemed to be

typical of an institution of its period. There seemed to be plenty of space, there were some pockets in the college where students 'hung out' but, on the whole, it did not feel overcrowded. In fact, in some respects it felt sparse and under-funded. This contrasted with the newer site, located in the very centre of the city. This site was plush, modern and, although much of it felt like a maze, it appeared very attractive to the eye. There were students everywhere - many inhabiting the foyer and other common areas. Classrooms and, perhaps, space in general, were evidently in shortage. There appeared to be a great diversity between the students - being a college it attracted those from a variety of backgrounds - different ages, sexes, ethnicities, and so on.

During the course of the visits (10 in total) I had much contact with different members of staff and students. Staff seemed to be relaxed and, although busy, less pressured than in the secondary schools that I visited. They appeared to turn up for their lessons and then leave. Pupils also seemed to have a more relaxed approach to their studies and the staff - calling them by their first names, making demands upon them with regard to marking of coursework and feedback, and in terms of their general attitude towards them.

Prospectus Information: **Brookfield College** offers 150 full-time courses to school leavers and adult learners. There are also many part-time courses on offer. In one of the sites alone there are 600 courses. The college prospectus (Brookfield College, 2002) draws attention to it having the widest choice of courses in the area allowing for any range of combinations of subjects. The college runs courses from Level 1 in which students will have few or no basic qualifications, up to higher education. Courses at the higher levels are possible through strong links with three nearby universities. The college also boasts two national Beacon Awards for innovation and excellence in foreign language teaching and engineering.

Students opting for vocational courses have any number of possibilities including BTEC diplomas, VCEs, NVQs, or modern apprenticeships. The modern apprenticeship offers training opportunities at NVQ Levels 2 and 3. At Level 3 there are 9 AVCEs available and 15 BTEC National Diplomas, plus courses which fall under 9 other qualification titles. Those wishing to study academic subjects can choose between GCSE, and 38 AS/A2 levels in subjects. Entry requirements for vocational courses at this level are four GCSEs at grade C or above (including English and appropriate subjects) and five GCSEs for academic courses. Adult learners may also opt for an Access course to provide them with a foundation before continuing their education at university. All students will study *Key Skills* and are also encouraged to participate in enrichment activities such as sports, computers, dance, first aid, and the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

The college offers a range of facilities to students including cafes, restaurants, a hair and beauty salon, sports clubs, nurseries, student union representation, and social events. Pupils are also given

full Internet access. Each student will be assigned a personal tutor and there are counselling and welfare support services for those who need them. Tutorial support is also available.

School D – Hipford College

Hipford College, located in the north of Bristol, caters to 2000 14-19 year olds and 10,000 adult learners at the college itself and in more than 50 locations in the community. Courses on offer to students are both academic and vocational. As with **Brookfield College,** it was impossible to attribute a particular socio-economic location to this institution because it attracted students from all over the city, and being on the edge of Bristol, also drew students from outside the immediate locality.

Researcher Impressions: Immediately upon entering the college grounds it was apparent that the pupils had nowhere to 'hang out'. There was a small car park which was clearly insufficient - an overflow car park was situated a few minutes away. There were no green areas and instead pupils stood outside the entrance to chat and smoke. There was a small cafeteria near the entrance where some chose to meet friends in between classes. There was also a student union building in the same vicinity but this was run down and the atmosphere was not especially welcoming.

I spent much time in the foyer waiting for students as I had to arrange interviews on an individual basis. It was clear that the students there were from a variety of backgrounds - young, old, black, white, and what was particularly noticeable, was the number of pupils who had learning difficulties.

Having been refurbished the college felt like a comfortable environment although the student union building seemed less welcoming with pool tables, loud music, and poor decor; some of the pupils who were interviewed made similar observations. I did not have the opportunity to meet many staff as all contact was made through a single person who was based at the student union.

Prospectus Information: There have been many changes in recent years both in terms of location of facilities and in terms of refurbishment. By the time of completion, an estimated £30 million will have been spent providing a new library, new science laboratories, increased IT facilities with a range of learning resources, a student social area, cafes, and the Bristol Academy of Sport, and the South West Academy of Dramatic Arts.

Hipford offers a range of academic and vocational courses and encourages students to mix courses and levels. The college offers the more typical AS/A2 level for academic options in more than 40 subjects, and a range of vocational qualifications including the vocational A level which may be pursued as a 3, 6, or 12 unit award, thereby being equivalent to either one AS, one A level or two A

levels. Students also pursue the additional programme in *Key Skills* intended to prepare them for employment or which will contribute to their university application.

On the vocational front courses include '*administration and secretarial work*', '*animal sciences*', '*health and beauty*', languages, and a modern apprenticeship programme. It also has a new Centre of Vocational Excellence for '*gas installation and maintenance*' and '*aerospace engineering*'. The modern apprenticeship programme is run on two levels depending upon the age and qualifications of the student. At **Hipford**, the modern apprenticeship is available in '*administration*', '*customer service*', '*IT*', and '*child care*'.

The Bristol Academy of Sport offers rugby, golf, hockey, football, netball, basketball, table tennis, swimming, boxing, and gymnastics if there is sufficient demand. Students entering the academy will pursue their full-time core subject with an additional 10 hours of sports training. There is much support for the academy in the local area.

Students at the college can expect a personal tutor to provide them with feedback upon progress and to develop their *Key Skills*. There will also be progress evenings to which parents of students under the age of 19 are invited. The college also provides written reports, careers guidance and individual learning support. There are welfare, counselling, and accommodation services, and help with applications for university and/or employment if required (Hipford College, 2003).

Norway

School E – *Blåfoss videregående Skole*

Blåfoss, an academic school, is located in the south east of Oslo in a higher socio-economic area. The journey takes approximately 30 minutes by tram from the centre along a very beautiful route which overlooks the fjord. The visits were made in the Winter when the whole area was covered in snow making it extremely picturesque with traditional wooden houses lining much of the journey.

Blåfoss is a parochial area and the school attracts mainly those from the surrounding community. Those who live there are usually fairly wealthy. In total, it is able to educate 360 pupils and has a staff of 40. It is the oldest of the schools in this study, dating back to 1889. In 1917 it became a public school and in 1936 it became a *gymnasium*. Since 1926 it has been in its present building/location. The school literature notes, "Inne i bygningen finner du en hyggelig atmosfære og kan nesten føle at de lange tradisjonene henger i veggene" (2002:1) (*Within the building you will find a pleasant atmosphere. You can almost feel the long tradition hanging in the walls*).

Researcher Impressions: The school was only a few minutes walk from the tram stop and, as with the picturesque journey, the school also provided a stunning image - a mixture of its history and the

weather. Despite this initial impression the interior of the school was a little disappointing. It was a little difficult to find the entrance, and even when one did, it was not particularly clear that this was the main entrance. One was greeted only by a flight of stairs to the rest of the building with the main offices on the second floor. There were few pupils and it felt cold and uninhabited. The one area which struck me as being more vibrant was the area around the staffroom where there were bright lights, people moving around, and the decor seemed to be well-kept. Outside also, there seemed to be a lot of activity with a large group of boys enjoying the icy path that could be taken as a precarious short-cut down to the road.

The two members of staff whom I encountered were very friendly. In fact, they copied and distributed the questionnaires without realising I would have liked to administer them myself. It was this school that led to missing information with regard to the sex of the pupils since they wished to preserve the anonymity of their pupils and assigned each an identification number. Those pupils who took this seriously did not give their name or sex. This was the only school in the study which required such a precaution before they agreed to participate. Whilst no introductory visit was made, good contact was established with the two members of staff, and on one visit I became particularly involved in an English lesson.

Prospectus Information: As a purely academic school, the only course available is '*general and business studies*' and the entrance requirement for the year 2002/3 was 44.16. Those whose first language is a minority language may pursue the first year courses over an extended period of two years. Those subjects which are available as options in the second and third years include the *natural sciences and maths, IT,* and *languages.* Elective subjects are available in *choir, physical education, travel,* and *psychology.* The school encourages pupils to choose unusual combinations of subjects, perhaps mixing maths with languages. The main theme of the school is the natural sciences and in connection with this has strong links with the University of Oslo.

The school is unusual in that it provides both *French* and *German* as 'B' languages, that is, subjects which depend upon some prior knowledge of the language and in which the curriculum is, therefore, condensed and to a higher standard. 'C' languages, such as *Spanish*, require no prior knowledge but the curriculum is covered over three years rather than two. At ***Blåfoss***, pupils can combine a 'B' and 'C' language, that is, '*French* and *Spanish*' or '*German* and *Spanish*', in addition to *English*.

The school has strong links internationally with partner schools in Denmark, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Germany and is part of the EU project (Socrates/Comenius). Depending upon pupil study options pupils in their second year take trips abroad, for example, to Ireland, France, Germany, or Belgium.

There is good co-operation between pupils and staff, and there is a pleasant and informal environment. It is currently experimenting with a new timetable with pupils in years two and three. All five-hour courses will most often be scheduled to be taught on the same day rather than distributing them throughout the week. Pupils will receive two free study days within a five week period. As with ***Solfjell*** (see below) this new timetable is aimed at increasing teacher support and pupil differentiation.

School F – Vannsjø Videregående Skole

Vannsjø, an academic school with strong musical traditions, is located very closely to ***Nesby*** (School H), that is, on the outer ring of the city centre. It was first built in the 1890s with an increase in the number of pupils in the *folkeskole*. It became an academic *videregående skole* in 1937 (then known as *gymnas*). Located in the building of an old boat canvas factory, the remaining site is now listed. It had clearly been renovated very recently, and with continued road works outside one had a sense of the whole area being uplifted even though it is situated in a lower socio-economic area. The school is of a reasonable size with 498 pupils.

Researcher Impressions: Vannsjø was easily accessible by bus and on the outskirts of a popular part of the city which has become particularly 'trendy' amongst young people in recent years. The school is only a few minutes walk from this area. It was easy to find the three entrances to the school, one of which was designated for visitors only. From here it was possible to find the reception and offices of the senior management. There was a gentle buzz to the school and the surroundings felt pleasant.

The staff were very friendly and I was provided with the facilities required. Although it was a meeting room, it did feel a little as though it were a storage room with demure lighting and a desk surrounded by unused computers. The staffroom, as with other Norwegian schools, seemed to be attractive and well-decorated and staff approached me to speak in a friendly and welcoming manner. On one occasion, a member of staff was celebrating his 60th birthday. Other staff had written songs to commemorate this and the words and tunes were circulated throughout the staffroom so that all could join in. Although this is a Norwegian tradition typically seen at weddings, ***Vannsjø*** arranges this for any significant staff event, perhaps because of the musical talents within the school.

The teacher whose class I visited did not speak much English but we were able to mix English and Norwegian so that we could communicate sufficiently. She warned that the class were quite rowdy. I was also told on a later occasion by a pupil that this school was one that had a reputation for pupils who had their own style, a school that accepted individuality.

Prospectus Information: Although it is an academic school, it also offers a vocational course in *'music, dance and drama'* which includes academic subjects as part of Advanced Course II (no stated entrance requirement) in addition to *'general and business studies'* (entrance requirement 47.00 in the year 2002/3). Options available in Years 2 and 3 are *sciences, languages, social studies* and *music.*

With recent renovations, the school is able to offer pupils new classrooms, music studios, reading rooms and a library. There are also extended computer facilities and pupils have access to the library and additional tutoring after lessons have finished.

The school is very proud of its musical achievements and opportunities. It participates in many theatrical events each year and has a teacher who is specifically assigned to facilitating pupil social activities such as revues. ***Vannsjø*** also participates in *'Oslo indre øst'*, a programme designed at improving the social environment in the East of Oslo. This enables the school to initiate and participate in socially related activities such as sports groups including swimming and ball games.

School G – *Sæther Videregående Skole*

This school is the largest in Oslo with 1548 pupils and 330 staff and offers courses for over 200 trades. It is located centrally and very near to the University of Oslo and is in a higher socio-economic area.

Researcher Impressions: ***Sæther videregående skole*** is a rather large and imposing building, walking distance from the local underground station, but also built on one of the city's three ring roads and surrounded by a football stadium, university and hospital. The walk from the train to the school involves crossing some major roads which are scattered with services such as a garage, pizza house, and a fast food kiosk. As one walks up to the school there are various outlets associated with pupil training, for example, a functioning bakery/cafe which backs onto the school.

There was a steady flow of students in and out of the school but it never felt particularly busy. All entrances to the school were via a car park with the main entrance designated for visitors only. There was a large entrance hall with porters but still no sense that one was entering the school, perhaps because of the lack of students or because of the location of the entrance.

The staff were extremely friendly and approachable. There had been some difficulties in arranging the visits but the secretary and deputy head whom I was to interview, had worked through this. At all times I felt very welcome at the school. Facilities were provided for the interviews and a pupil schedule arranged. Furthermore, the deputy head was uncomfortable with English but still agreed to the interview. As it transpired, communication was unproblematic when she spoke Norwegian

and I spoke English. Whenever there was confusion we were able to negotiate the meaning. The impression I gained from this interview, the informal conversations I had with the two secretaries, and those with the pupils, was that this was a large institution, based in the West, but one which attracted pupils from the East because of its vocational nature and lower entrance requirements. It seemed that the size of the school and its intake led to many issues which the staff endeavoured to cope with. This was not a simple process, however, perhaps because of the attitude of the pupils towards the school - on more than one occasion I was told that this was the school one attended when one couldn't get in anywhere else!

Prospectus Information : The school offers nine subjects in the first year of study. These are listed below with the entrance requirements for the year 2002/3 in parenthesis:- *'arts, crafts and design studies'* (31.00), *'health and social studies'* (29.33), *'hotel and food processing industries'* (28.00), *'electrical trades'* (30.25), *'mechanics'* (27.00), *'building and construction'* (28.40), *'technical building'* (26.95), *'media and communication'* (new and therefore no entrance requirement available), and *'agriculture, fishing and forestry'* (entry requirement unavailable) .

In Year 2, students have a range of 22 options to choose from depending upon their first year choice. Many pupils will begin apprenticeship training following two years of school work. Those who remain in school may select options from *'decorating', 'health secretarial work', 'media and communication', 'dental secretarial work', 'drawing, art, and colour',* and *'service electronics'. 'Building'* is available as a part-time course. Those studying *'media and communication'* will study additional academic subjects to enable them to continue their studies after upper secondary school (that is, Advanced Course II). There is also the option to study in England during their second year and many of those interviewed had done so.

Special needs support is available for pupils selecting *'health and social studies'* in their first year and those whose first language is not Norwegian can opt to study a preparatory one-year course before they begin their upper secondary studies. Adult education is also available in *'foot therapy'* over a two year period. Finally, ***Sæther*** offers courses in *'mechanics', 'general studies'* and *'media studies'* for pupils who have lost interest in education and who have dropped out of their studies at some earlier stage. These courses focus heavily upon the practical possibilities within the subject areas.

The school pays particular attention to the multi-cultural diversity of its pupils and is concerned with how the school is organised and relations between those teaching and studying there. It claims to be particularly challenged by increases in violence and crime which it hopes to address by working more closely with parents and by improving the school environment, particularly within the classroom. It also faces competition with other schools. Competition can be addressed by

working more closely with private agencies and through making links with organisations outside of Norway. *Sæther* also hopes to expand further such that all courses which are available within the Norwegian educational system are on offer at the school. School developments also focus upon improving the quality of life for pupils by strengthening their role in both learning situations, and in the democracy of the school.

School H – *Nesby Videregående Skole*

This school, built in 1959, is located centrally in Oslo, slightly to the north east in one of the lower socio-economic areas. It is a vocational school with approximately 600 pupils and became a *videregående skole* in 1971. It has a number of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds and describes itself as 'characterised by diversity'.

Researcher Impressions: The foyer to the school was attractively decorated with art. A staircase in the centre of the foyer clearly linked different parts of the school and at different times throughout the day one could feel bustle and activity in this area. At these times it was possible to note the diversity of backgrounds within the school, and also to notice that many pupils were hearing impaired and communicating through sign language.

I was shown to the reception area by a pupil whom I approached. My contact person was extremely helpful and introduced me to various members of staff. In fact, she spontaneously arranged for a second interview with a member of staff as she felt that I would benefit from meeting this person. The staffroom was vibrant and friendly and filled with art work and people taking refreshments. Those with whom I spoke welcomed me and happily moved between English and Norwegian, all very interested in the research I was conducting. It was a comfortable environment and I was provided with all the facilities I needed; a pupil schedule was arranged to meet my needs.

Within the school itself the corridors were less attractive than the entrance with one corridor appearing much like another. It emerged that the pupils on the different courses did not mix because of the physical layout of the school since the facilities required for the different courses were located far from each other. Since I met pupils from only one course I did not have access to other parts of the building.

Prospectus Information: The lines offered in the first year are *'arts, craft and design studies'*, *'health and social studies'*, and *'sale and service studies'*. Entrance requirements for the year 2002/3 were 30.83, 31.90, and 35.16 respectively. In the second year pupils may choose to follow one of four courses, *'child and youth work'*, *'health service'*, *'sale and service'*, or *'drawing, art and colour'*, depending on the courses studied in their first year. In the third year students who have chosen the *'sale and service'* line may choose an option in *'health secretarial work'*, and those who chose

'drawing, art and colour' may continue with the same option. Those pursuing this latter course can also elect to study the General Studies Supplement

Special needs support is also offered at ***Nesby*** to those studying *'General Studies'* and to those pursuing options in *'health and social studies'*. The academic option is offered to pupils with hearing impairments at all three levels, and support is also available for those studying *'health and social studies'* in their first year, and to pupils studying *'child and youth studies'* or *'drawing, art and colour'* in their second year.

The school describes itself as a 'safe and nice environment' with a variety of support services. It has 100 computers available for student use, a library and a range of elective subjects in addition to the main course options outlined above. It has recently started an internationalisation programme, and those pupils who follow the *'sale and service'* track have the opportunity to become involved in a youth simulated business.

School K – *Oppstrøm Videregående Skole*

Oppstrøm is situated some 30 minutes by train from the centre of Oslo. It is one of the first rural areas that emerges when leaving the more industrial parts of the city, and in the snow, the area is extremely picturesque. The school was identified as being located in a higher socio-economic area.

Researcher Impressions: Oppstrøm was the one school which did not leave any particularly strong and lasting impressions upon me. It was a school of average size and average age, and there were pupils from a range of backgrounds milling around upon each visit. As with many of the other Norwegian schools, there was no definite entrance to the school and a pupil directed me to the reception.

The staff were very welcoming and direct in the information they gave me and it was possible to build up good relations over a period of time. The first visit involved a presentation of my research to a class of students who had recently returned from spending their second year of study in the English town, Bournemouth. Much of the discussion focussed upon comparing English and Norwegian culture - homes, childrearing, teaching and learning styles, and general impressions. Following the initial visit, a schedule was arranged and facilities provided for interviews.

Prospectus Information: The school offers both academic and vocational courses – *'general and business studies', 'sports studies'* and *'health and social studies'*. Entrance requirements in 2002/3 were 33.16, 36.85, and 37.50 respectively. Pupils who follow the *'general studies'* option may apply to study in England in their second year. Many of the students who were interviewed were those who had chosen this option.

Pupils who choose to pursue *'general studies'* may select options from the *natural sciences, social sciences* and four *languages* in their second and third years in addition to some subjects from the *economic and administration* line. (Those on the *economic and administration* track can choose from a range of economic options and IT). Those following the *sports line* can also take options to give them the General Studies diploma through Advanced Course II. Pupils who follow the *'health and social studies'* option can specialise in *'child and youth studies'* in their second year and seek apprenticeship in their third year. This course is also offered to adult learners over an extended period of two years. Special needs support is offered to those pupils studying *'general studies'* in their first year.

In addition to the various courses on offer, the school boasts extensive IT facilities with over 250 computers available for teaching and learning. Furthermore, since 2001 each pupil in one of the first year classes is given a laptop computer to work with throughout the year.

Socially, the school has a theatre group, opportunities for dance, ball game tournaments, a music group, self defence classes, a games group, law group, and ICT workshops. There are good playing fields and with excellent access to sport in Østmarka, an area of hills and woods to the East of Oslo, pupils are able to participate in outdoor sports such as snow-boarding.

School J – *Solfjell Videregående Skole*

This school, which educates 649 pupils, was built in 1961 and, historically, has a reputation for a good education. It is located in the south east of the city, far away from the centre, and was the first *videregående skole* built in the suburbs after WWII. It is very close in proximity to ***Blåfoss*** - perhaps only a few kilometres - and yet the local area is very different. Residents in the area tend to be either elderly or from an ethnic minority. The lower levels of employment found in such a population mean that the school is, in fact, located in a lower socio-economic area. However, most of the pupils at the school travel from other parts of town with ***Solfjell*** recruiting from more than 30 *ungdomsskoler*. This is possible since one of the main train lines runs close to the school.

Researcher Impressions: First impressions of the school suggest it is an older, though certainly not historic building. It has a sense of being a little run down but more because of the architectural style rather than because of the state of repair. It is a large school with a main building and a separate entrance and facilities for those with special educational needs. Once one is in the school there is no real centre to it with stairs and corridors leading off in many directions. Downstairs there is a reading room for pupils, and upstairs the office. One of the corridors was decorated with photos of pupils during their *russetid*, dating back to the late 1960s. The third visit made to the school was also during *russetid* and the contrast in the atmosphere between this and the other two

occasions was noticeable - a calm, quiet place on the first visits, there were pupils and bustle everywhere on the final visit.

All contact with this school was made through the head teacher who personally organised my visits, escorted me to the relevant rooms, visited with tea and biscuits, and provided me with documentation about the school and the Norwegian educational system, some of which was in English. He seemed to be very much in touch with his pupils whom he interacted with informally, even those whom we passed in the corridor.

Prospectus Information: The school provides three basic courses – *'general and business studies', 'sports studies',* and *'health and social studies'*, hence it offers a combination of both academic and vocational courses. The entrance requirements for these in the year 2002/3 were 51.16, 42.33 and 44.50, respectively. *'general and business studies'* and *'sports studies'* are offered school-based throughout and those studying *'sports studies'* can take Advanced Course II in general subjects to gain access to higher education. Those studying *'health and social studies'* in their first year may only specialise in *'child and youth studies'* in their second year before seeking apprenticeship in their third year.

In-class support for less able pupils and for those from minority language backgrounds is available for those pupils studying *'general and business studies'*. Those pursuing the *'general and business studies'* line from the start have the option to choose between *natural sciences, maths, social sciences, languages,* and *ICT*. There are also a number of elective options to choose from - *home page design, revue, social anthropology, dance, drama, cookery, counselling* and *psychology* (Solfjell vgs, 2002).

The school's aim is to provide a broad range of choices and to provide high quality teaching. It has good work opportunities and rooms are light and functional. The school is somewhat innovative in its approach to teaching with interdisciplinary projects covering current relevant themes which may last the whole academic year. Like ***Blåfoss***, they are also trialling a new system of teaching in which the number of subjects covered on a daily basis is fewer. This reduction should provide increased opportunities for teacher supervision and student differentiation.

The school is known to have a good social environment and is accepting and open. It makes a conscious effort to develop cultural activities as a means of contributing towards personal development. Such activities include revues, sports activities and an international week.

Appendix 10 - Example of Norwegian Upper Secondary Certificate

VITNEMÅL
VIDEREGÅENDE OPPLÆRING

Navn: Fødselsnummer:

har i 2002 bestått 3-årig opplæring som omfatter i studieretning for

D001 grunnkurs formgivingsfag Formgivningsfag
D004 videregående kurs I tegning/form/farge Formgivningsfag
D030 videregående kurs II tegning/form/farge Formgivningsfag
og har oppnådd generell studiekompetanse

Omfang	Kode	Fag	Standpunkt-karakter	Eksamens-karakter	Eks-form	År	Merknader
5	VG1200	Engelsk	4 FIRE	----		V01	
2	VG1332	Matematikk 1X	3 TRE	----		V02	
5	VG1400	Naturfag	5 FEM	----		V02	
2	VG2500	Samfunnslære	3 TRE	----		V01	
14	VG4000	Norsk hovedmål, skriftlig (BM)	2 TO	3 TRE	S	V02	
	VG4001	Norsk sidemål, skriftlig (NN)	2 TO	3 TRE	S	V02	
	VG4005	Norsk, muntlig	4 FIRE	----		V02	
4	VG4600	Nyere historie	3 TRE	----		V02	
3	VF1310	Matematikk 1MA-Y	4 FIRE	----		V00	
6	VF4900	Kroppsøving	5 FEM	----		V02	
7	FO1010	Tegning	6 SEKS	----		V00	
7	FO1020	Form	5 FEM	----		V00	
6	FO1030	Farge	6 SEKS	----		V00	
2	FO1040	Kunst- og kulturhistorie	3 TRE	----		V00	
	FO1999	Tverrfaglig eksamen *	----	6 SEKS	P	V00	
8	FO2310	Tegning	6 SEKS	----		V01	
5	FO2320	Form	5 FEM	----		V01	
5	FO2330	Farge	6 SEKS	----		V01	
1	FO2340	Skrift	3 TRE	----		V01	
1	FO2350	Beskrivende geometri	4 FIRE	----		V01	
4	FO2360	Kunst- og kulturhistorie	3 TRE	----		V01	
	FO2399	Tverrfaglig eksamen **	----	3 TRE	SP	V01	
6	FO4410	Tegning	6 SEKS	----		V02	
3	FO4420	Komposisjon	5 FEM	----		V02	
2	FO4430	Moderne kunsthistorie	4 FIRE	----		V02	
	FO4499	Tverrfaglig eksamen **	----	3 TRE	PM	V02	
1	VL1840	Matematikk, konstruksjon og mønster	3 TRE	----		V02	
2	VL2300	Grafisk formgiving	2 TO	----		V01	
2	VL2540	Styrketrening	3 TRE	----		V00	
2	VL2600	Bygningskultur og modellbygging	4 FIRE	----		V02	

Sum omfang: 105 Orden og atferd: Nokså god

Fravær 1.år: 1 dager 46 timer 2.år: 7 dager 71 timer 3.år: 11 dager 35 timer

* Omfatter tegning, form og farge

** Omfatter alle studieretningsfag

Vitnemålet kan, dersom søkeren er 21 år eller yngre, legges til grunn ved opptak innenfor primærvitnemålskvoten, jf § 2-2 i forskrift om rangering av søkere ved opptak til grunnutdanninger ved universiteter og høgskoler

Sted og dato: OSLO, 26.06.2002

Skole: videregående skole

Rektor:

Appendix 11 – Phase I – Additional Findings

Whilst the questionnaire analysis largely focused upon pupil responses to the question items, there was much additional data derived from Part 2 of the questionnaires, that is, the demographic or background information of each of the pupils. This additional analysis is presented below.

Background Factors

This section focuses upon creating a context for the English and Norwegian samples by considering the background information that pupils gave within the questionnaires. These background factors have been conceptually divided into two groups. The first is described as 'key background factors' (*country of residence, gender, nationality, ethnicity,* and *socio-economic status*), that is, those which explicitly relate to the research questions. The nature of the *subjects studied* was added to this list since it was a factor in the criteria used for selecting pupils for interview and, therefore, naturally played a significant part in the study. The second grouping of background factors was concerned with *demographic* information such as parental education and sibling progression following upper secondary school.

Most of the analysis in this section involves frequencies since cell sizes were often too small for statistical analysis. Where it was possible such analysis involved using Pearson's chi- square, Yate's continuity corrected value of chi-square, or Fisher's exact test of probability, whichever were appropriate.

England

The English data was gathered from four institutions, two schools with sixth forms and two colleges of further education. One hundred and twelve pupils completed the questionnaire, 49 male and 63 female. Of these, 94.6% were English and 95.5% described themselves as white or caucasian. When considering the socio-economic status of the pupils, based upon the highest parental ranking according to the UK Registrar General's Social Classification, it was found that 38.7% were from professional/academic backgrounds, 36.9% from skilled, and 17.1% from semi/non-skilled backgrounds (7.2% were classified as 'other'). 71.4% of the pupils were studying A levels, 20.5% vocational courses such as AVCE, and 8.0% a mix of the two.

The great majority of English pupils lived in a house (99.1%). Most pupils, although not all (88.4%), also lived in a privately owned home. The rest of the pupils lived in rented accommodation. Most pupils (70.3%) lived with both their parents although a substantial number lived with either a single parent (13.5%) or two parents, one of whom was a step-parent (14.4%). 96.4% of pupils had siblings, usually one or two. Of those with siblings, approximately half had siblings who were presently in upper secondary or had studied at this level in the past. When

questioned about what the siblings did subsequently there were three *main* responses - they sought employment (37.9%), continued their studies (8.6%) or were still in upper secondary education (24.1%). Missing information represented approximately half of the data.

Pupils were also questioned about parental education and employment. Most parents were found to be in employment; 87.4% of English mothers and 99.1% of fathers. Only 50.0% of mothers, however, had studied at the level of upper secondary or higher, and 49.4% of fathers. It should be noted that missing information accounted for approximately a third of responses concerned with parental education.

All such demographic variables were analysed in relation to the key background factors, for example, whether there was a significant relationship between the *gender* of the pupil and their *parents' employment.* There were no significant findings in any case, although small cell sizes did place severe restrictions upon the results. The key background factors were then analysed against each other, for example, whether there was a significant relationship between the *gender* of the pupil and their *ethnicity*. It was found that (i) *male* and *female* pupils tended to choose to study different *subjects* and, (ii) perhaps unsurprisingly, that the *nationality* and *ethnicity* of the pupils were significantly related. See tables 48 and 49 below for the results:-

Table 48 The relationship between *gender* and *subjects studied* in England

	Background Factor		
Gender	Subjects studied		
	Academic %	*Vocational %*	*Academic and Vocational %*
Male	89.8	4.1	6.1
Female	57.1	33.3	9.0
$\chi^2 = 15.996$, df = 2, p<0.0005			

Table 49 The relationship between *ethnicity* and *nationality* in England

	Background Factor	
Ethnicity	Nationality	
	English%	*Other %*
White	98.1	1.9
Non-white	20.0	80.0
Fisher's test of probability, p<0.0005		

Almost all male pupils in England (89.8%) chose to study academic courses, specifically the AS/A2 option. This compares with 57.1% of females. 33.3% of female pupils selected vocational courses compared with 4.1% of males. The differences between the genders are less emphatic where the choice involves a combination of academic and vocational options. This result may simply reflect which pupils were made available for the study by the institutions. For example, the main

vocational course from which students were drawn was a BTEC in childcare, a subject traditionally chosen by female pupils rather than males.

In terms of ethnicity and nationality, 98.1% of pupils who described themselves as 'white' also gave their nationality as 'English'. Only 20% of 'non-white' pupils were English, with 80% being of a different nationality.

Norway

The Norwegian data was gathered from six further education schools. The contribution of each institution was fairly evenly split. One hundred and fifty eight pupils completed the questionnaire, 58 male and 93 female (a further 7 did not provide information about their gender). 84.1% of the pupils were Norwegian and 87.8% described themselves as white. 12.2% of those living in Norway were from a non-white background. In terms of socio-economic background, 66.2% of pupils came from professional/academic backgrounds, 22.3% from skilled, and 8.1% from semi/non-skilled (3.4% were classified as 'other'). 73.4% of pupils followed academic courses, 10.8% vocational, and 15.8% were registered for vocational courses but one in which there were a sufficient number of academic options to permit them to gain both an academic and vocational diploma at the end of their studies.

Considering the range of other factors which were elicited from the questionnaire, cell sizes for the Norwegian data also proved too small for statistical analysis. As with the English sample, however, it was possible to gain an understanding of the sample from data frequencies.

72.4% of Norwegians lived in a house compared with 26.3% who lived in a flat. 86.6% of these homes were privately owned compared with 13.4% of those which were rented. Thus it was more common to live in a flat in Norway than in England. It was also less common to live with both one's parents (59.9%). 26.1% of Norwegians lived with a single parent and 7% with two parents, one of whom was a step-parent. 93% of pupils had a sibling, usually one or two. Of those with siblings, approximately half had siblings who had been or were in upper secondary education. Immediately following upper secondary school, these siblings had either sought employment (50%), continued their studies (10.5%) or were still in upper secondary (19.7%). As with England, these figures account for only half of the possible data.

With regard to parental education and employment, 93% of mothers were employed and 94.6% of fathers, 86.2% of mothers had studied at upper secondary school and 85.9% of fathers. Thus, in terms of education there was a stark difference between the English and Norwegian samples with many more Norwegian parents having received an upper secondary education. Missing information also only represented 3.8% of those responses relating to the mother's education and 10.1% of

responses to the father's education. These Norwegian figures would suggest that when a parent has received an upper secondary education the pupil knows about it. From this, one might conclude that the high non-response rate of the English pupils indicates that the parents had not received an upper secondary education rather than the pupils being unaware of the parents' level of education.

As with the English data, all variables (demographic and background) were analysed against each other using the appropriate statistical analysis. In the Norwegian sample, it was found that the *ethnicity* of the pupils had a bearing upon whether or not they lived in a privately owned or rented accommodation, whether their parents were in employment, and whether their father had received an upper secondary education. A related background factor, *nationality*, also interacted with whether the pupil's home was privately owned or not, and whether or not the father was in employment. Finally, as with the English sample, the key background factors, *ethnicity* and *nationality* were significantly related. Tables 50, 51, and 52 explicate the findings more fully:-

Table 50 The relationship between *ethnicity* and various *other factors* in Norway

	Background Factor	
Ethnicity	**Ownership**	
	Rented %	***Privately owned %***
White	9.4	90.6
Non-white	33.3	66.7
Fisher's test of probability, p=0.011		
Ethnicity	**Mother's Employment**	
	Unemployed %	***Employed %***
White	5.5	94.5
Non-white	22.2	77.8
Fisher's test of probability, p=0.031		
Ethnicity	**Father's Employment**	
	Unemployed %	***Employed %***
White	2.5	97.5
Non-white	26.7	73.3
Fisher's test of probability, p=0.003		
Ethnicity	**Father's Education**	
	No Upper Secondary %	***Upper Secondary %***
White	11.9	88.1
Non-white	35.7	64.3
Fisher's test of probability, p=0.031		

Pupils from a non-white background were less likely to live in a privately owned home than pupils from a white background, their parents were more likely to be unemployed, and their father was less likely to have an upper secondary education.

Table 51 The relationship between *nationality* and various other factors in Norway

	Background Factor	
Nationality	**Ownership**	
	Rented %	***Privately owned %***
Norwegian	7.6	92.4
Other	40.0	60.0
Fisher's test of probability p<0.0005		
Nationality	**Father's Employment**	
	Unemployed %	***Employed %***
Norwegian	3.2	96.8
Other	17.4	82.6
Fisher's test of probability p=0.021		

Pupils who were not Norwegian were more likely to live in rented accommodation than Norwegians. Unemployment rates were greater amongst the fathers of such students.

Table 52 The relationship between *ethnicity* and *nationality* in Norway

	Background Factor	
Ethnicity	**Nationality**	
	Norwegian%	***Other %***
White	89.9	10.1
Non-white	44.4	55.6
Fisher's test of probability, p<0.0005		

89.9% of white pupils also described themselves as Norwegian compared to 44.4% of non-white pupils. Approximately half of non-white pupils were of a different nationality.

England and Norway Compared

This section is concerned with the entire sample, that is, both England and Norway, and aims to identify where possible biases in the data may be located. The following table gives a breakdown of the frequencies for each key background factor within each of the countries as outlined in the earlier sections. Additional data can be found in table 56 at the end of this section.

Table 53 Frequencies for key background factors in England and Norway

		England (n=112)		Norway (n=158)	
		No.	%	No.	%
Gender	Male	49	43.8	58	36.7
	Female	63	56.3	93	58.9
	Unknown	0	0	7	4.4
	Total	112	100.1	158	100
Nationality	Native	106	94.6	133	84.1
	Other	6	5.4	25	15.9
	Total	112	100	158	100
Ethnicity	White	107	95.5	139	87.8
	Non-white	5	4.5	19	12.2
	Total	112	100	158	100
SES	Class I/II	43	38.7	105	66.2
	Class III	41	36.9	35	22.3
	Class IV/V	19	17.1	13	8.1
	Other	8	7.2	5	3.4
	Total	111	99.9	158	100
Courses	Academic	80	71.4	116	73.4
	Vocational	23	20.5	-	-
	Mix	9	8.0	42	26.6
	Total	112	99.9	158	100

Note: Rounding errors account for discrepancies in totals

As can be seen from this table there are more Norwegian pupils than English in this study, more females than males, more native white pupils, more pupils from a professional/academic background, and more pupils pursuing courses that will lead to an academic qualification. The largest single *voice*, therefore, is that of the "white Norwegian female from a professional/academic background studying an academic course".

The six key background variables (*country of residence, gender, nationality, ethnicity, socio-economic status* and *subjects studied*) were analysed in relation to the demographic factors, again using Pearson's Chi Square, Yate's continuity corrected value of chi-square or Fisher's exact test of probability, whichever were appropriate. This time, however, the entire data set was used and thus, the main variable was that of *country of residence.* There was a significant difference in terms of *parental education*, both that of the mother and father, and whether a pupil was living in *England* or *Norway.* Significant results were also found between *English* and *Norwegian* pupils in terms of their *socio-economic status* and the *subjects* they were studying. The following tables illustrate the findings:-

Table 54 The relationship between *country* and *parental education*

	Background Factor	
Country	**Mother's Education**	
	No Upper Secondary %	***Upper Secondary %***
England	50.0	50.0
Norway	13.8	86.2
$\chi^2 = 33.568$, df = 1, p<0.0005		
Country	**Father's Education**	
	No Upper Secondary %	***Upper Secondary %***
England	50.6	49.4
Norway	14.1	85.9
$\chi^2 = 32.082$, df = 1, p<0.0005		

Norwegian parents were more likely to have studied in upper secondary education than those in England. In fact, in England approximately half of parents had, and half had not. In Norway, however, approximately 86% of parents had studied in upper secondary compared to 14% who had not. This may reflect the historically earlier development of post-compulsory education in Norway.

Table 55 The relationship between *country* and selected *background factors*

	Background Factor			
Country	**Pupil SES**			
	Class I/II %	***Class III %***	***Class IV/V %***	***Other %***
England	38.7	36.9	17.1	7.2
Norway	66.2	22.3	8.1	3.4
$\chi^2 = 19.708$, df = 3, p<0.0005				
Country	**Subjects Studied**			
	Academic%	***Vocational %***	***Academic and Vocational %***	
England	71.4	20.5	8.0	
Norway	73.4	0	26.6	
$\chi^2 = 44.417$, df = 2, p=0.000				

More students from Norway were from higher socio-economic backgrounds than students from England. A total of 66.2% compared with 38.7% were allocated to Class I/II based upon information given in the questionnaires. There were more English students in the lower bands than Norwegians. Whether a student was from England or Norway was also important in terms of the subjects studied. English and Norwegian pupils were equally likely to study academic subjects whereas the English were more likely to study vocational subjects, and the Norwegians to study a mix of both. That there were no pupils who were studying solely vocational subjects within the Norwegian sample has been discussed in the sampling process (see Chapter Three).

Table 56 Frequencies of upper secondary background variables

Variable	Values	Frequency		Percentage (%)	
Nationality	English	106		39.3	
	Norwegian	133		49.3	
	Other	31		11.4	
	Total	270		100.0	
Pupil SES	Class I/II	141		52.2	
	Class III	73		27.0	
	Class IV/V	32		11.9	
	Total	246		93.3	
Parental		**Mother**	**Father**	**Mother**	**Father**
Employment	In work	243	250	90.0	92.6
	Out of work	25	9	9.3	3.3
	Total	268	259	99.3	95.9
Parental SES		**Mother**	**Father**	**Mother**	**Father**
	Professional	20	23	7.4	8.5
	Management	84	90	31.1	33.3
	Skilled	74	68	27.4	25.2
	Semi-skilled	29	26	10.7	9.6
	Unskilled	13	11	4.8	4.1
	Unemployed	23	7	8.5	2.6
	Unclassifiable	24	43	8.9	15.9
	Student	1	1	0.4	0.4
	Housewife/husband	1	0	0.4	0.0
	Total	269	269	99.6	99.6
Parental Upper		**Mother**	**Father**	**Mother**	**Father**
Secondary	Yes	171	160	63.3	59.3
Education	No	61	59	22.6	21.9
	Total	232	219	85.9	81.1

Variable	Values	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Family Context	2 parents	172	63.7
Living with:	1 parent	56	20.7
	2 parents (1 step)	27	10.0
	2 families	3	1.1
	Other	10	3.7
	Total	268	99.3
Accommodation	House	224	83.0
	Flat	42	15.6
	Bedsit	2	0.7
	Total	268	99.3
Ownership	Rented	34	12.6
	Owned	235	87.0
	Total	269	99.6
No. of Siblings	0	16	5.9
	1	139	51.5
	2	70	25.9
	3+	45	16.7
	Total	270	100.0
No. of Siblings with	0	114	42.2
Upper Secondary	1	97	35.9
Education	2	33	12.2
	3+	10	3.6
	Not applicable	15	5.6
	Total	269	99.6
Subject areas	Academic	196	72.6
studied by pupils	Vocational	40	14.8
	Mix	34	12.6
	Total	270	100.0

From these analyses it is possible to identify inconsistencies in the data, both in terms of the general characteristics of the English and Norwegian data sets and in terms of the distribution of pupils across the background variables. This is important in a comparative study since any conclusions rest upon the premise that the original data sets were entirely comparable.

Pupil opinions – common responses

Within Chapter Five the analysis of pupils' responses to the question items has been presented. Additional analysis was carried out based solely upon *frequencies* of pupils' responses to each of the questions as a means of establishing further background information about the two samples.

England

In the English sample, there were 12 items where the majority of the pupils shared a common response (see table 57 below); these 12 items related to 3 broader themes. The pupils tended to agree in relation to:- (a) what upper secondary offered them, (b) their current education in relation to their earlier education, and (c) future pressures or plans. English pupils, on the whole, were happy to have continued their education and were happy with the support and options that had been available to them, they believed that their earlier education had been a good basis for their current studies, and that their current education was more difficult compared to those in the past. With regard to the future, they felt pressured to do well at school and believed upper secondary was important as a means of securing future employment. They also felt there was an imminent need to think about future career plans and, in fact, most pupils did have plans.

Norway

In Norway, 13 of the questions elicited responses in which 70% or more of the pupils responded in the same way (see table 58 below). Responses tended to converge in relation to:- (a) potential influences when making choices about upper secondary education, (b) issues concerned with staying on, and (c) future pressures and plans. Norwegian pupils reported that neither practical matters nor parental aspirations influenced their choices, and that most of their friends had continued their education. They also said that they had never considered dropping out of upper secondary education and that they were happy to have continued. Norwegian pupils, like English pupils, felt pressured to do well at school and that an upper secondary education was important for future employment. They also believed that the main purpose of upper secondary was to prepare pupils for university. The pupils felt that the need to think about a future career was imminent with most having already made plans. In addition to these three trends in the responses, Norwegian pupils also believed that academic and vocational courses did not have the same status.

Frequency of pupils' responses to questionnaire items

For the purpose of establishing where there was a consensus amongst the pupils, 70% was chosen as the cut-off point. It was decided that this would provide a clearer picture and stronger message with regard to the findings in the study. This is not to say that a different and lower cut-off point, for example, 55%, might not also be possible. Figures in bold are above the 70% cut-off point.

Table 57 Frequency of English pupil's responses to questionnaire items

Question	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Missing	Total
1. My earlier education has been a good basis for my current studies.	95	**85.6**	16	14.4	1	112
2. My initial choices in upper secondary were influenced by my lower secondary grades.	67	59.8	45	40.2	0	112
3. On the whole, I think my lower secondary grades reflect my true ability.	67	59.8	45	40.2	0	112
4. I think the educational system is only fair to those who have good grades.	55	49.1	57	50.9	0	112
5. I think my current studies are very difficult compared to my previous education.	81	**72.3**	31	27.7	0	112
6. Practical matters such as travel expenses influenced my choices about where to study.	43	38.4	69	61.6	0	112
7. What my parents wanted me to study influenced my choices.	20	17.9	92	**82.1**	0	112
8. I have never considered dropping out of upper secondary education.	65	58.0	47	42	0	112
9. I only stay in upper secondary education because there is nothing else for me to do.	10	8.9	102	**91.1**	0	112
10. On the whole, I am glad that I decided to continue my education.	109	**97.3**	3	2.7	0	112
11. In making my choices, I received all the support from my teachers that I needed.	83	**74.1**	29	25.9	0	112
12. I am happy with the options that have been available to me since I finished lower secondary school.	87	**77.7**	25	22.3	0	112
13. I feel that I am an important and valued part of this school.	65	58.6	46	41.4	1	112
14. I think that I gain more from what I learn outside school than I gain from inside it.	40	36.0	71	64.0	1	112
15. When I do leave school, I will not be sad to go.	55	49.1	57	50.9	0	112
16. Academic and vocational courses have the same status.	45	41.7	63	58.3	4	112
17. Lots of my closest friends left school after lower secondary school.	34	30.4	78	69.6	0	112
18. I feel pressured to do well at school.	83	**75.5**	27	24.5	2	112
19. I think the government is doing a lot to help people after they have finished lower secondary school.	49	45.0	60	55	3	112
20. Upper secondary education is very important if I am to get a job in the future.	98	**89.1**	12	10.9	2	112
21. The main purpose of upper secondary education is to prepare pupils for university.	60	53.6	52	46.4	0	112
22. I do not think upper secondary really helps me to develop as a person.	27	24.1	85	**75.9**	0	112
23. I don't regret any of the choices I've made since finishing my lower secondary education.	63	56.3	49	43.8	0	112
24. I do not have much time before I need to think about my future career plans.	85	**76.6**	26	23.4	1	112
25. I have plans for the future.	91	**82.0**	20	18.0	1	112

Table 58 Frequency of Norwegian pupil's responses to questionnaire items

Question	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Missing	Total
1. My earlier education has been a good basis for my current studies.	134	84.8	24	15.2	0	158
2. My initial choices in upper secondary were influenced by my lower secondary grades.	71	44.9	87	55.1	0	158
3. On the whole, I think my lower secondary grades reflect my true ability.	81	51.9	75	48.1	2	158
4. I think the educational system is only fair to those who have good grades.	101	64.7	55	35.3	2	158
5. I think my current studies are very difficult compared to my previous education.	66	41.8	92	58.2	0	158
6. Practical matters such as travel expenses influenced my choices about where to study.	29	18.4	129	81.6	0	158
7. What my parents wanted me to study influenced my choices.	26	16.6	131	83.4	1	158
8. I have never considered dropping out of upper secondary education.	132	84.1	25	15.9	1	158
9. I only stay in upper secondary education because there is nothing else for me to do.	31	19.6	127	80.4	0	158
10. On the whole, I am glad that I decided to continue my education.	154	98.1	3	1.9	1	158
11. In making my choices, I received all the support from my teachers that I needed.	64	41.0	92	59.0	2	158
12. I am happy with the options that have been available to me since I finished lower secondary school.	97	61.8	60	38.2	1	158
13. I feel that I am an important and valued part of this school.	65	41.7	91	58.3	2	158
14. I think that I gain more from what I learn outside school than I gain from inside it.	82	54.3	69	45.7	7	158
15. When I do leave school, I will not be sad to go.	106	68.4	49	31.6	3	158
16. Academic and vocational courses have the same status.	30	19.4	125	80.6	3	158
17. Lots of my closest friends left school after lower secondary school.	23	14.6	134	85.4	1	158
18. I feel pressured to do well at school.	120	77.4	35	22.6	3	158
19. I think the government is doing a lot to help people after they have finished lower secondary school.	47	31.3	103	68.7	8	158
20. Upper secondary education is very important if I am to get a job in the future.	146	92.4	12	7.6	0	158
21. The main purpose of upper secondary education is to prepare pupils for university.	130	83.3	26	16.7	2	158
22. I do not think upper secondary really helps me to develop as a person.	56	35.7	101	64.3	1	158
23. I don't regret any of the choices I've made since finishing my lower secondary education.	77	49.0	80	51.0	1	158
24. I do not have much time before I need to think about my future career plans.	135	85.4	23	14.6	0	158
25. I have plans for the future.	113	73.4	41	26.6	4	158

Appendix 12 – Question items providing significant/non-significant results

The following question items elicited *significant* differences between the English and Norwegian pupils using Pearson's chi-square, Yate's continuity corrected value of chi- square, or Fisher's exact test of probability:-

2. My initial choices in upper secondary were influenced by my lower secondary grades.
4. I think the educational system is only fair to those who have good grades.
5. I think my current studies are very difficult compared to my previous education.
6. Practical matters such as travel expenses influenced my choices about where to study.
8. I have never considered dropping out of upper secondary education.
9. I only stay in upper secondary education because there is nothing else for me to do.
11. In making my choices, I received all the support from my teachers that I needed.
12. I am happy with the options that have been available to me since I finished lower secondary school.
13. I feel that I am an important and valued part of this school.
14. I think that I gain more from what I learn outside school than I gain from inside it.
15. When I do leave school, I will not be sad to go.
16. Academic and vocational courses have the same status.
17. Lots of my closest friends left school after lower secondary school.
19. I think the government is doing a lot to help people after the have finished lower secondary school.
21. The main purpose of upper secondary education is to prepare pupils for university.

The following question items did *not* elicit significant differences between the two samples:-

1. My earlier education has been a good basis for my current studies.
3. On the whole, I think my lower secondary grades reflect my true ability.
7. What my parents wanted me to study influenced my choices.
10. On the whole, I am glad that I decided to continue my education.
18. I feel pressured to do well at school.
20. Upper secondary education is very important if I am to get a job in the future.
22. I do not think upper secondary really helps me to develop as a person.
23. I don't regret any of the choices I've made since finishing my lower secondary education.
24. I do not have much time before I need to think about my future career plans.
25. I have plans for the future.

Appendix 13 – Factor analysis of responses to question items

Table 59 Factor analysis of responses to *question items (England)*

Factor	Q	Weighting	Q	Weighting	Q	Weighting	Q	Weighting
1	19	.791	11	.629	13	.612	-	
2	10	.791	12	.649	20	.617	-	
3	1	.740	15	-.581	3	.553	8	.400
4	25	-.699	5	.625	2	.599	-	
5	18	.712	21	.683	23	-.627	-	
6	14	-.702	16	.690	-		-	
7	24	.810	9	.476	-		-	

Questions 4, 6, 7, 17 and 22 did not relate to a particular factor.

Table 60 Factor analysis of responses to question items (Norway)

Factor	Q	Weighting	Q	Weighting	Q	Weighting	Q	Weighting	Q	Weighting
1	9	.696	22	.662	14*	.489	-		-	
2	11	.682	12	.656	6	.519	13	.491	14*	-.413
3	2	.751	3	.623	1	.562	-		-	
4	4	.737	17	.715	5	.639	-		-	
5	19	.635	4	-.608	18	-.568	-		-	
6	24	.709	25	-.579	-		-		-	
7	8	.769	10	.631	-		-		-	
8	16	.744	23	.641	-		-		-	
9	20	.719	21	.502	-		-		-	

* This question item relates significantly to two factors but is more heavily weighted within factor 1.

Question 15 did not relate to a particular factor.

A list of the question items per factor is provided below:-

England

Factor 1 - *Support from educational system*

19. I think the government is doing a lot to help people after they have finished their GCSEs.

11. In making my choices, I received all the support from my teachers that I needed.

13. I feel that I am an important and valued part of this school.

Factor 2 - *Extrinsic gain from upper secondary*

10. On the whole, I am glad that I decided to continue my education.

12. I am happy with the options that have been available to me since I finished my GCSEs.

20. Upper secondary education is very important if I am to get a job in the future.

Factor 3 - *Pupil evaluation of their education*

1. My earlier education has been a good basis for my current studies.

15. When I do leave school, I will not be sad to go.

3. On the whole, I think my GCSE results reflect my true ability.

8. I have never considered dropping out of upper secondary education.

Factor 4 - *Temporal issues*

25. I have plans for the future.

5. I think my current studies are very difficult compared to my previous education.

2. My initial choices in upper secondary were influenced by my GCSE grades.

Factor 5 - *Main purpose of upper secondary*

18. I feel pressured to do well at school.

21. The main purpose of upper secondary education is to prepare pupils for university.

23. I don't regret any of the choices I've made since finishing my GCSEs.

Factor 6 - *Evaluation of educational system*

14. I think that I gain more from what I learn outside school than I gain from inside it.

16. Academic and vocational courses have the same status.

Factor 7 - *Life beyond upper secondary*

24. I do not have much time before I need to think about my future career plans.

9. I only stay in upper secondary education because there is nothing else for me to do.

Questions

The following questions are items which did not seem to group together:-

4. I think the educational system is only fair to those who have good grades.
6. Practical matters such as travel expenses influenced my choices about where to study.
7. What my parents wanted me to study influenced my choices.
17. Lots of my closest friends left school after their GCSEs.
22. I do not think upper secondary really helps me to develop as a person.

Norway

Factor 1 - *Intrinsic gain from upper secondary*

9. I only stay in upper secondary education because there is nothing else for me to do.
22. I do not think upper secondary *really helps me to develop* as a person.
14. I think that I gain more from what I learn outside school than I gain from *inside it.*

Factor 2 - *Support in decision-making*

11. In making my choices, I received all the support from my teachers that I needed.
12. I am happy with the options that have been available to me since I finished my GCSEs.
6. Practical matters such as travel expenses influenced my choices about where to study.
13. I feel that I am an important and valued part of this school.
14. I think that I gain more from what I learn outside school than I gain from inside it.

Factor 3 - *Lower secondary as preparation for upper secondary*

3. On the whole, I think my GCSE results reflect my true ability.
2. My initial choices in upper secondary were influenced by my GCSE grades.
1. My earlier education has been a good basis for my current studies.

Factor 4 - *Positioning oneself*

7. What my parents wanted me to study influenced my choices.
17. Lots of my closest friends left school after their GCSEs.
5. I think my current studies are very difficult compared to my previous education.

Factor 5 - *Influence of outside agencies*

19. I think the government is doing a lot to help people after they have finished their GCSEs.
4. I think the educational system is only fair to those who have good grades.
18. I feel pressured to do well at school.

Factor 6 - *Life beyond upper secondary*

24. I do not have much time before I need to think about my future career plans.
25. I have plans for the future.

Factor 7 - *Remaining in upper secondary*

10. On the whole, I am glad that I decided to continue my education.

8. I have never considered dropping out of upper secondary education.

Factor 8 - *Choices after lower secondary*

16. Academic and vocational courses have the same status.

23. I don't regret any of the choices I've made since finishing my GCSEs.

Factor 9 - *Main purpose of upper secondary*

20. Upper secondary education is very important if I am to get a job in the future.

21. The main purpose of upper secondary education is to prepare pupils for university.

Questions

Item 15 did not seem to group with any of the other items.

15. When I do leave school, I will not be sad to go.

Appendix 14 – A collection of pupil vignettes

The pupils who participated in this study were real people with real lives. It is always possible that this can be lost when discussing themes and trends within the data. This section aims to guard against such a loss through a series of 18 vignettes. These particular pupils were selected because their accounts illustrated their decision-making pathways in a concise and succinct manner making it easier to re-tell their story. The vignettes do not take account of everything that was discussed in the interviews but, instead, focus upon the main decisions the pupils made and the background to these choices. Pseudonyms are used throughout to preserve the anonymity of the pupils. This appendix concludes with my own vignette to illustrate the pathway of choices which led to this research project.

England

The following seven vignettes are based upon interviews with English pupils.

Vignette 1 – *Jemima* – Eddington School

Jemima had three sisters, two older and one younger, as well a nine year old brother. At **Eddington** she was known as one of the 'Campbell sisters'. She had always attended **Eddington** as had her older sisters. They were now at university, one studying a degree in physics and the other in law. Her mother was a school nurse at **Eddington** and her father a senior manager at Rolls-Royce. Jemima had high expectations of herself, as did her family. There always was a plan for lower secondary, upper secondary and university. Jemima said that she felt lucky because she was academically able and felt comfortable that there was a plan in place.

Jemima had chosen to study A2 maths, further maths, physics, general studies and AS psychology. She felt comfortable with her choice of subjects. Most of her family had chosen to study maths and she too was keen on the subject. She also wanted to study physics and had loved it at GCSE. Her third choice of A level was drama. She says, "My last choice, I was in a bit of a debate because basically, I wanted to do drama. I loved it at GCSE but it didn't fit in the column so I just, literally, looked down the last column at what I can do, said, 'I don't want to do biology', don't like it, and history, I didn't want to do, and the only possibilities were English literature and French. But, what with all the work from maths and further maths, which is quite hard, I thought I wouldn't have all the time for reading or all the things required for English literature and just did French instead".

When asked about choosing a school, Jemima said that she didn't really know much about other sixth forms and she didn't want to go to a college. She had looked at them but had decided that she was happy at **Eddington** and also that she probably wasn't confident enough to change to another school where all the other pupils already knew each other. However, she had wondered whether she should have gone elsewhere because she was often frustrated at being 'Joanna and Elaine's

sister' or 'one of the Campbells'. Also, most of her friends had left school at 16 to study performing arts at either **Hipford** or **Brookfield College.** Her boyfriend was still at **Eddington** but she had felt very isolated and had become very clingy to him because of this. The one good friend she had made in her year group was Christopher but this had led other classmates to gossip and spread rumours about her relationship with him which had been very unpleasant. All of this had led to a very miserable time in Year 12.

In spite of her problems the previous year, things had improved in Year 13 when Jemima had decided to drop French and had chosen to study AS psychology instead. She wished she had never studied French because she felt she would never use it even though she loved to learn the language. She soon discovered that she found psychology easy and, being the eldest and most able in her class, her confidence was suddenly restored. Whereas she had always been 'top of the class' in the lower school, she was in competition with the most able pupils in upper secondary and this too had been a blow to her confidence. The change to psychology had proved to her that she was still a capable pupil and as a consequence she felt able to build new friendships.

When speaking of her plans for the future, Jemima said that she would like to train as a teacher after studying for a maths degree. She said that she found it difficult to imagine herself studying at such a high level, that it was too big a jump for her to think about even though she knew that by the time she got there she'd be able to cope with it. She hoped to study at the University of Bath and would be disappointed if she didn't get the grades to secure herself a place. She said that it wasn't simply because of the course but because she knew she could do it.

24 months later – Jemima was in the second year of a maths degree at Nottingham University. This had been her insurance choice of university. She had failed to attain the grades for both Bath and Nottingham but her personal statement had been strong and Nottingham had accepted her anyway. She felt very happy with her course and was doing well. She had decided that, although there was the possibility for a fourth year of study, she would only study for three years and, thereafter, train to become a teacher. She was happy with her lifestyle and was enjoying a good social life in addition to feeling confident about her studies.

Vignette 2 – *Jacob* – Eddington School

Jacob enjoyed sports and socialising. He felt he was a good listener, good with people and a good leader. He was one of four school captains at **Eddington** as well as captain of the school rugby team. He lived with his mother and father; his mother worked as a dental nurse whilst his father, who had a degree in chemistry, was working as a science teacher at **Eddington.** Both his siblings were at university. Jacob had attended King Edward's School (KES) for his lower secondary education. This was a private school which he had been able to attend as a result of securing a

rugby scholarship. However, this ended when he was 16 and his parents were unable to afford to pay for his upper secondary education there. Instead, he moved to St David Davies Secondary School which was close to his home and began an AVCE in business studies.

Jacob didn't settle at his new school and had become "a bit rebellious". He failed his exams at the end of Year 12 and, with little support from the school he was left wondering what to do. His father was a teacher at **Eddington** and suggested that he start over again there. Jacob joked that he felt his father wanted to 'keep an eye on him'. He said that he was glad that he made the decision to change. He knew he needed an education – part-time work as a sales assistant and then some security work had taught him that he didn't want to do that all his life. He also described how a week's work experience at a primary school had made him realise that he would like to become a teacher and in order to do that he needed the grades. Failing in Year 12 had helped him to understand that he must work for his A levels.

Jacob spoke of the importance of the support and advice he had received. He felt that at his first sixth form it was his problem that he had failed his exams and he had to solve it. His father had been very supportive and Mr Jones, head of sixth form at **Eddington**, had rung him at home to tell him about **Eddington**. He was invited for a visit and took a look around the school. His older brother and sister had encouraged him to continue because university was worth it if he could get through his A levels. Jacob decided to make the change, not only in school but in subjects as well. At St David Davies he had been struggling with the amount of coursework involved with an AVCE in business studies. He said that his choice had been limited because of the school options and that he couldn't really choose what he wanted. He felt that the nature of the AVCE course was difficult unless you were really interested in the subject and able to motivate yourself. Now at **Eddington**, he studied A level biology, sport studies and sociology and had studied AS psychology in Year 12. Biology and sport studies were easy to choose because he was interested in them but he had had to choose sociology and psychology because that was all that fitted in on the timetable with the other subjects. Jacob was also bemused that changing school had affected his character; from being a rebel in his previous school he was now one of the school captains.

For the future, Jacob had conditional offers at Plymouth, Cardiff and Liverpool. He would study a BA in Education (Sport). He hoped to study at Cardiff and, thereafter, to become a teacher although he had been thinking about a three year contract in the police force before the degree. He saw the police force or army as a contingency in spite of improvements in his approach to learning and the possibility of attending university – "I really see myself in the army".

12 months later – It was not possible to contact *Jacob* again.

Vignette 3 – *Harry* – Stepleigh School

Harry lived with his mother and three older brothers. He had the impression that all of his family were dissatisfied with their lives. His mother worked as a legal secretary, his father was a delivery man, two of his brothers were in jobs they were unhappy with and one was unemployed. Harry believed their situation resulted from their non-academic background. Consequently, he believed it was important to stay on at **Stepleigh** and continue his education.

Harry's mum wanted him to go to university because no else in the family had ever done it whilst his father wanted him to be in a sound financial position whatever employment that might mean. A lot of his friends had left school at 16 to find work and yet Harry never thought about leaving school. He spoke of his brothers – "I just knew it was important really….. two of them are in jobs they don't really enjoy and the other one is unemployed so I always had a guideline of what not to do cos I knew what was going to happen if I didn't do it". He described how he wanted to wake up everyday and go to a job he enjoyed rather than struggling with a job he didn't like as he had seen his parents do. He says, "I'm going to be somebody". Needing five Cs at GCSE in order to stay on in the sixth form became crucial in motivating Harry as his goal became to secure a place at university.

Harry decided to stay on at **Stepleigh**; he knew the teachers and they knew him. He also said, in hindsight, "I wouldn't have been going to university if I'd gone to college cos I just wouldn't have had that drive". Staying at **Stepleigh**, however, did mean that many of his subject choices were restricted. He said,

> A lot of my lessons was dictated by the timetable cos looking back I wouldn't have did photography if I could have did another, if I could have did media but cos it was in, cos of the timetable it's got to be a different categories so in a way I felt like I was forced into doing it. And it wasn't made clear enough that whatever I do at AS is really really affect my university choices like points and all that and none of that was really made clear. All they said was do something you enjoy but I, to be honest with you, I wish I could have had more freedom with what I could do. If I'd did media as well I'd been here, at Oakwood, Newnham, and like, moving around, all the time, but I didn't want to go to college cos it's like starting anew isn't it?

In the end, Harry chose to study A level photography and English, AS sports studies in Year 12, AS media studies in Year 13, and a maths GCSE re-sit. The sports studies course was at Oakwood School and the photography was at the **Wolfson campus** of **Brookfield college**. Harry noted that **Stepleigh** was no longer the base it had been at the beginning because his courses were split between the different institutions in the Stepwood Partnership and also because his closest friends had now left. Even now, he says that there is a lot of pressure on him from friends who are working and do not understand why he remains in school.

When asked if he was happy with his choices, Harry suggested that he should have studied A level media studies instead of photography. However, it would have meant that he wouldn't have been studying it at **Stepleigh** and he wondered whether he might not have enjoyed it if he had been elsewhere. He really enjoyed media but he did not feel he could take a third year to make it an A2 because he did not want to be a year older than everyone else at university. He wanted to complete his degree and then travel and did not want to be delayed in this plan.

Harry spoke about his experiences. The most positive was growing up over the past two years, having a good social life, and having a girlfriend. The most negative was after sitting the AS exams and discovering that he might not have sufficient points to get into university and that the sixth form might have been a waste of time. He described how he felt let down by his teachers because it was not made clear how important the points were; pupils were not encouraged to think about their long term goals. He suggested that he would have chosen his subjects more wisely if he had had more information although he admitted that he probably didn't know then what he wanted to do.

With regards to his future plans, Harry secured a place at Trinity College, Carmarthen to study advertising and media. Having gained 40 points from his Year 12 AS exams, he needed only pass one of his A2 exams to gain a further 40 points in order to be guaranteed a place. He felt excited, scared, and a little nervous at how quiet Carmarthen might be – he had heard there wasn't much there other than countryside.

20 months later **–** ***Harry*** passed his exams with an E in media photography, a C in English language and a C in sports studies. This gave him the points he needed to go on and study advertising and media at Trinity College. It was a sandwich course which meant that in his second year he would be studying in Iowa. He said he was happy with his choices but he wished he had worked harder with his A levels. In the long term he planned to find employment in advertising, not because he especially liked it but he felt that was where the jobs could be found.

Vignette 4 – ***Jacqueline*** **– Stepleigh School**

Jacqueline lived with her mother, father and two younger sisters, aged 14 and 9 years. Her mother had left school at 16 and now worked as a dinner lady. Her father had studied maths in sixth form and now ran a family computer business. Jacqueline described herself as patient, but also lazy, and *always* late. She worked in a toy shop on the weekend and also enjoyed spending time with her friends and going to the gym. She was currently studying A2 history and A2 art animation at **Stepleigh** and, as part of the Stepwood Partnership, A2 psychology at **Brookfield College (Wolfson campus)**.

Jacqueline really enjoyed school, especially the extra curricula activities such as music, dance, hockey, and netball. In fact, there was nothing she really recalled disliking. She'd always had good relations with her teachers and had done well with her GCSEs, getting over C in all her subjects and an A* in history. She had always thought about her education and even if not really aware of its importance, she had always tried hard. She felt that she had realised for herself – doing badly in mock exams, having a week of work experience, and hearing how hard other people worked to get where they were had all made an impact upon her. Jacqueline's parents also had ambitions for her and wanted her to stay on. Her mother hoped that one day she would go to university.

Jacqueline had decided to stay on at **Stepleigh**. The school had provided good support with tutorial sessions, careers advice, and the head of sixth form had interviewed everyone about their plans for staying on. In addition, all her friends were staying, the school offered the subjects she was interested in, she felt comfortable with all the teachers, and although only A levels were offered she felt happier studying a qualification she already knew about rather than starting something new. Staying at **Stepleigh** was simply an easier option than going to one of the colleges which were far away from where she lived. She had also heard negative rumours about other schools and **Wolfson**, one of the campuses attached to **Brookfield College**, which was close to her home, didn't impress her. However, when it came to deciding which subjects to choose she wanted to study psychology. This was available through the Stepwood Partnership but meant she would have to attend **Wolfson**. She noted that her friends were also going there which made it an easier decision for her to make. Now attending the college she liked it because there were different teachers and the students were treated with more respect. She felt that at **Stepleigh** pupils were still treated as though they were children. In the end, Jacqueline admitted that when choosing to stay on she simply didn't look at alternatives to her current sixth form.

Jacqueline had no particular career in mind and so she felt that it would be better to study subjects at A level that she was good at and that she enjoyed. With these factors in mind, she chose to study history and art, and psychology, a third subject, because it was new and sounded interesting. She recalled how unnerved she had been when the idea of making choices had first been introduced. "You start thinking about your choices and that and then they ask you what you want to take. Yeh, it actually came quite quickly cos I remember thinking 'I can't believe what they're asking me to take already'. Do you know what I mean? That was really odd, but like even now when we've got to choose what we want to do in university I still think now 'God they ask us to choose already'".

Jacqueline also noted that the school was keener on pupils taking a particular path – A levels in sixth form and then university, which meant there was less support for those who wished to look for work. "I personally haven't had a lot of information about careers and jobs outside. I think the school's more keen on you going on to university so they're kind of more, gives you more

information about that rather than careers". Jacqueline went on to say that she thought she would have liked to study marine biology but had not been given information about what qualifications were needed to study for various professions. She had felt that she would do badly in her GCSE sciences and, consequently, turned off from them. However, she got a B in her exams and, therefore, would have been able to study an A level science but by then she was thinking of other subjects. She felt that she had missed her chance and that it would be a waste of time to go back.

For the future, Jacqueline had received conditional offers to study history at both of the universities in Bristol, as well as offers from universities in two other cities. She had decided to remain in Bristol. "I thought that if I was like in Swansea and I had a really bad day and I'd only just started university and I'd have no one to speak to but if I went to Bristol or UWE (University of West England) and I had a really bad day I could just come home and see one of my friends or my family". She also spoke of how difficult it was to think about the future and that she could never have thought about a degree in history at 16 and so may be whilst she is in university she will be able to think about the next stage after that. "If I get really really crappy grades and I fail all of them and I don't get to university I've no idea what I wanna do because there's nothing else I wanna do other than go to university".

19 months later – Jacqueline was about to begin the second year of a degree in history at UWE. She was really enjoying herself and very happy with the course. She regretted studying at a local university and said she had wished she had listened to others who had suggested she should move away. However, she was looking at the possibility of moving out of her parent's home. Jacqueline had no plans for the future; she believed that by the end of her degree she would have changed and be more aware of what she would like to do.

Vignette 5 – *Andrew* – Hipford College

Andrew came from a large family. He lived with his parents and four younger siblings – three brothers and a sister in a privately owned house. His father had gained his university education over many years whilst studying part-time and now worked as an accountant whilst his mother had no upper secondary education and now worked as a housewife and mother. Andrew described himself as 'family oriented'. He said that he was good at taking care of his younger siblings. He had very little spare time but, when he did, he enjoyed playing football. He also worked part-time as a sports journalist for the local newspaper and since being at college he had started dating. This had made a big impression on him; he was very happy in his relationship and he and his girlfriend spent much time studying together.

Andrew had attended Vivary High School. He had always enjoyed school - he liked his teachers, he enjoyed learning, he had a good time with his friends, and he had been, physically, very active.

In fact, there really was only one aspect of school which he didn't like - that it was compulsory; he felt that teachers and pupils alike seemed to feel they *had* to be there. Andrew also noted the pressure that he and other pupils were under with exams. "You were assessed all the time so there was no escaping, you know, the fact that this was important".

Andrew's school had told him and his classmates about the courses on offer in the sixth form but they were also arranging for trips to the colleges in the area. The pupils were also given information to take home and discuss with their parents and later their personal tutor discussed their options with them. Following all of this, Andrew decided to leave school and attend **Hipford College** because his school did not offer media studies. His long term goal had been to become a journalist and his subject choices were based upon this aim. He did want to study PE but he felt that A2 English and AS media studies were a better combination for the future. He also chose A2 business studies following the advice of his father.

Talking about his choices, Andrew said that it was hard to walk away from his friends because he was the only one to go to **Hipford.** He also said that he wished he had studied business studies sooner. He had come to realise that he was quite good at it and, after working for a local paper for the last three years, he realised that he didn't want to become a journalist after all. "I have learnt some really good skills but I've changed as a person". "This isn't easy, you know, this isn't glamorous, this isn't, this is people who work hard for very little money in a very tense and stressful environment. I mean, they do write articles and your name is in the paper, and yes, you know, but at the end of the day it's not as glamorous and it's not a job where you would go on for a future". He had been offered a permanent job at the local paper but had turned it down.

In speaking of his experiences, Andrew recalled how difficult it was for him to discover that he would not be able to attend a good university or a university of his choice. His exam results were too poor at the end of his first year at **Hipford.** He felt very hurt by this, especially as his friends were going. He felt as though he had let himself down.

> You can always come back here and do what you like but you realise that you just didn't have enough, you just weren't good enough and that realisation is very frightening and very, very, real, you know.....You make so many plans in college, you really do. You make plans on going to university, how you're going to pay for that, where you're going to go, where you're going to live, what you're going to do, how you're going to get there. At the back of your mind you are going to fail, and when you do, all those things that I've just said collapse.

It took away a lot of Andrew's self-esteem although, in the long run, he feels it has made him a stronger person. He now plans to study business studies at a local university. Andrew says that it was so difficult to accept lower grades when he had put so much work in over the year. He felt that

it was too big a jump from GCSE to AS and, not realising this, he had expected his AS results would be higher. "I misunderstood how much harder it was".

Talking about his reasons for choosing to study at a local university, Andrew spoke of an open day he had recently attended at Cardiff University in which a student had spoken of her experiences. She had casually remarked that when short of money she simply asked her parents. Andrew had been very shocked by this. "I didn't think that attitude existed." Although his father was prepared to pay for his university education, Andrew didn't feel he could take the money from him.

> I'll put a scenario to you. I move out and I go to London and I do a fantastic business course and I do fantastically well and after four years I owe something like £17,500..... who in their right minds would accept a situation like that?....It's just ridiculous, I know, you can earn that sort of money and I know that if, 'Well, those four years, they were fantastic, of course I should have moved out, £20,000 in debt or whatever, doesn't matter' but it's so much. It's a real choker to think about it especially with the houses as they are now and everything. You just think bloody hell.....I can't get passed that figure.

17 months later – Andrew was about to begin his second year at UWE where he was studying business studies. He had found a part-time job at Tescos at the end of his A levels and worked there in the holidays to raise enough money to pay for his fees and living expenses. He was thoroughly enjoying life at university and had no real plans for the future. He still thought about journalism but felt everything was open to him now. He said he had been naive to believe that he could have gone into journalism without gaining a degree first. Instead, he felt that, even in studying business, he could still return to the journalism at a later stage.

Vignette 6 – *Rachel* – Brookfield College (City campus)

Rachel described herself as 'bubbly', 'friendly', 'always happy', and 'sometimes too loud'. She lived with her parents and two sisters, one older and one younger. Her mother had trained as a teacher but now worked as a housewife and mother. Her father had a degree in geography and had his own business working with property planning. Rachel's older sister, now aged 21, was currently studying law at university.

Rachel had attended Napier Valley Secondary School. She had enjoyed her time there but her priority was to work. She saw the value of an education but she looked elsewhere for her personal development. "I knew it was important but I wasn't sure it was as important to me as it was to other people cos I'm not planning on going to university at the moment so I just thought, 'I'll get my GCSEs, I'll get a couple of A levels and see where I go from there'". Rachel had been working in a clothing store since she was 16 and wanted to continue working there. Consequently, many of her choices were dependent upon whether her studies were compatible with her work needs.

She could have stayed at her school sixth form but other sixth formers had told her that the teachers continued to treat the pupils as though they were children and that it wasn't possible to travel home during free periods. Since Rachel wanted to work as well she needed more flexibility than this. Instead, she looked at the **City campus** of **Brookfield College**, largely because of its central location which gave her easy access to her place of work. She also felt she would be in a better position for working during free periods within the day. Rachel visited the college, looked around, spoke to other students and found that they had the subjects she was interested in and, therefore, made the decision to study there. Her school had also been quite supportive in giving lots of information and bringing in people from other institutions. She said that they helped her to decide *not* to stay on at the school sixth form. Her parents were also important in motivating her to do A levels because, at one point, she had thought that she may not continue her education at all.

The college advised Rachel to study three subjects but this seemed too much alongside work and a GCSE re-sit in English and so she decided to study just two subjects – media studies and sociology. She described them as 'not really hard' and she felt she could do well in them. On reflection, she might have done a third A level because she passed her GCSE English on the first re-sit. Having said that, there were times when she has thought about giving up because she found it boring but having been there a year she felt she had to persevere and see it through to the end.

Thinking of her future, Rachel said, "I could go on to uni, I just don't think I'd enjoy it....I'm not the type of person that loves (academic) work. I do it because I have to, not because I want to". Instead, she planned to carry on working at Top Shop. Employees received training and in the two years she had worked there she had completed half of the study modules. She aimed to finish the rest of the training and then apply for a management scheme. She could then look at the type of jobs which were on offer to her and if she felt she needed a degree for them she still had the opportunity to do that. "I haven't made a final decision. I say I like retail now but in the next couple of years that could change. I'll just figure it out as I go along".

12 months later – It was not possible to contact *Rachel* again.

Vignette 7 – *Katie* – Brookfield College (City campus)

Katie lived in one of the poorer areas within Bristol. She lived with her mother, father and 23 year old brother. Her mother studied catering but now worked as a civil servant whilst her father, who had finished school at 16, was now a manager in a local company. Katie's brother had stayed on at school after 16 and now worked full-time as an accountant. Katie was currently studying a BTEC National Diploma in Early Years at **Brookfield College, City campus.**

Katie never felt that she fitted in with her class-mates in school. It was located in a deprived area and lots of the pupils were using drugs and stealing. She felt she should be doing the same but she didn't want to - she had an older boyfriend and wanted to spend time with him. She also wanted to be a solicitor and all her choices had been geared to this plan. She was offered an apprenticeship at a solicitor's office when she was 16 and so left school. Two months later, however, and she was questioning her aspirations. She found her work tedious and she disliked the attitude of the solicitor who "thought he was above everyone else". Katie could not imagine herself staying there for four years and, therefore, left.

Confused about her future, Katie spent a year working and thinking about what she would like to do. Working made her realise that she needed to continue her education and during that year she decided she would like to become a nurse – "I said to my boyfriend 'I want to become a nurse but I'm not brainy enough to go' because I didn't think, I thought, to be a nurse you'd had to have As in everything but I never looked into it. So he looked into it for me and applied to do the childcare course here. So that's how I done it basically and then I started this September and now going to uni in September". After that, Katie would like to train to become a midwife but needs the nursing qualification first. She described how she wants "to be part of the amazing experience of birth".

Katie spoke of her reason for studying at **Brookfield College**; it was a new building, a good location, and there was a direct bus route from her home. She also said that she had chosen to study the NNEB but at the interview she was told that her grades would be too high and that she should apply to study a BTEC National Diploma instead. She felt it was important to study such practically orientated courses because she wanted to make sure she was right in believing that she wanted to work with children. She also felt that work placements were what kept people on the course, that you learn more whilst on practise rather reading it all out of a book as with A levels. She was currently nannying for babies under one and felt spending two days a week with a baby was more useful than being told what to do by a lecturer.

Life at college had been quite difficult for Katie to begin with.

When I started college.... I wanted to leave cos I didn't really get on with anyone at college cos they're all younger than me. I didn't really get on with any of them and where I'd worked for year, I didn't do any (academic) work and to come back and do all the work was really hard and I hated coming to college.... No one was supportive. I went to my tutor and explained I didn't want to come anymore and she was like 'Well, you'd better think about it and then make your decision' and it was people I actually go to college with that made me realise to stay....I thought it was really bad that I went to lecturers for help....and they didn't care. It was my peers that had to say, 'Well, think of this and think of that' before I realised that I should stay.

Katie also felt that the support her boyfriend had offered her was crucial to the decisions she had made. She had come to appreciate having money when she had been working and was reluctant to return to a life without an income. However, her boyfriend was happy to support her financially and her parents, too, promised to help out. She said that her boyfriend also played an active part in helping her make a choice about a university place and was very supportive but had asked her to choose a local university so she had chosen to study at one of the two universities in Bristol itself. Katie's friends from home, however, had not been very helpful. Most of them worked and did not understand her plans for further study – "You don't want to go to uni. You're gonna be a snob if you go to uni". She says that she doesn't see them very often anymore.

12 months later – It was not possible to contact *Katie* again.

Norway

The following 11 vignettes are based upon interviews with Norwegian pupils.

Vignette 8 – *Mette – Blåfoss videregående skole*

Mette lived with her mother, an accountant in a company on the outskirts of Oslo, her father, a bus driver, and her 16 year old sister. She described herself as a keen handball player.

Mette was very clear about the purpose of a good education – "You can't get very far without one". She had always been serious about school and had always worked hard even when she wasn't enjoying it. Her parents were not strict; they did ask her about it but she knew it was her responsibility. She also knew that if her grades slipped her parents would remind her of how important it was for her to work for her future. She knew she couldn't leave school at 16; her parents would be disappointed and everyone did it - everyone wanted to be *Russ*.

Mette had always wanted to go to ***Blåfoss***. When she was younger she had played in a marching band and one of her friends, six years older than her, had attended ***Blåfoss***. She had told her it was a very nice school. When it came to choosing Mette did think briefly about applying to Røfjord *videregående skole* but it was far away and none of her friends were applying there. ***Blåfoss***, however, was only 10 minutes away from her home and all her friends from lower secondary school were hoping to secure places there. Also, her teachers and parents had told her to choose a school with a high *gjennomsnitt*. ***Blåfoss*** was one of the better schools although not 'the best'.

Mette had chosen English and social studies with Spanish as a third subject in her final year. She wished she had chosen maths because she felt that there were so many jobs where you needed it. She knew she could succeed in the subject but hadn't chosen it because she found it boring. She also wondered about vocational courses. "They have this travelling line, *reiseliv linje*, and I always

wanted to travel, live in another country and may be be a tourist guide and stuff like that so that would be helpful I think". She also thought about studying media but the only school that teaches it is ***Sæther videregående***, a large school with over a thousand pupils, located far from her home with a poor reputation and rumours of security guards in the halls.

Mette wanted to take a break after upper secondary school. She sometimes thought about going to Greece or may be travelling the world. She felt pressured because her two older cousins had always known what they wanted to do but she needed some time off to find out what she really liked.

28 months later – Mette pursued her interest in business and travel and studied it for a year after leaving ***Blåfoss***. However, she had not enjoyed the course and at the end of the first year decided it was not the career choice she had originally imagined. She decided to take a gap year in which to work and think about what she wanted for her future. In that time, she had been working at a local nursery and really enjoyed this. She now planned to return to university to study education with the hope of working with children with special educational needs.

Vignette 9 – *Ingrid – Vannsjø videregående skole*

Ingrid enjoyed basketball, football and socialising with her friends. She described herself as impatient, but her strengths were her obedience and ability to listen to others. She lived with her mother, a physiotherapist, her father, a lawyer, and her 14 year old sister.

For Ingrid, it was "Not a choice for me to quit after *ungdomsskole*". With good grades and parents with high aspirations for her, Ingrid knew she would continue her education beyond 16. She was a keen basketball player and had always enjoyed school because her *ungdomsskole* had always encouraged team sports. She had wanted to attend a school where basket ball was included on the curriculum but her mother was fearful of possible injuries and so, when that wasn't an option, Ingrid knew the only other alternative was the academic subjects.

Ingrid's teachers told her and her classmates about the different schools they could apply to but she didn't listen and so it proved to be a real dilemma to decide which school to apply for. Her friend's brother had studied at Bjørnstand and had enjoyed it and so Ingrid chose this as her first choice. However, after a year at Bjørnstand she decided to change school. It is a good school but students who attend it work hard and she didn't have the time to study so much because of her commitment to sport. She then went on to choose to study at ***Vannsjø videregående***, an hour away from her home, because she had heard positive things about it.

Ingrid chose to study a wide range of subjects as her *studieretning* – Spanish, German, maths, chemistry, physics and ball games but her choices had not been entirely straightforward. The arrangement of the timetable in her third year meant that German was at the very end of the day. This meant that she must spend the whole day in school without lessons. She came very close to dropping the subject but, after a trip to Germany when she told her teacher about her plans to leave the subject, she changed her mind. "I told my German teacher and she flipped out so, so she wanted me to stay for some reason and then I decided to do it and, well, I have managed".

Another difficulty with Ingrid's subject choices arose with chemistry. Ingrid had plans to study medicine. Her mother wanted her to become a doctor and Ingrid was happy to aspire to this. In order to study medicine she needed to study chemistry in both her second and third year of upper secondary school. However, there were an insufficient number of places in the second year chemistry class and since Ingrid had moved from another school she was not given priority to a place in the class. In turn, this meant that she would have to sit an additional exam after she had finished her upper secondary education. She and her parents would be visiting family in the States for three months and so she planned to read the chemistry curriculum during that time and sit the exam upon her return.

Ingrid hoped to become a plastic surgeon or a heart surgeon – "I want to do something with a knife". She thought that it would be good to take a two year break from her education; it is a long education and she wanted to know that she liked it since it would be for the rest of her life. She also felt that it would be difficult to study in a Norwegian university because of the grade requirement and thought that it might be possible to study in Germany, Ireland, or England since foreigners are accepted with lower grades. In the meantime, she planned to go to Costa Rica to play basket ball and had thought about learning Spanish to raise her *gjennomsnitt* further.

17 months later – Ingrid spent the year following her upper secondary schooling in the States and Canada – eight months in California and four months travelling elsewhere. She returned to Norway and spent five months playing handball whilst studying at a private school for her chemistry exam and an additional course in biology. She had secured a place at university to study medicine from the following semester and, in the meantime, had secured a position in a nursing home. However, she would still like to go to Costa Rica for three months to study Spanish or may be back-packing in Asia. She had also been asked to play hand ball for Norway's second team and could have played the season if she had planned her year better.

Vignette 10 – *Alexander – Vannsjø videregående skole*

Both of Alex's parents were Columbian and had moved to Norway some years earlier. Alexander had lived with his mother until five months ago but now lived with his father in one of the Oslo

suburbs, an hour away from ***Vannsjø***. His mother was a secretary and his father a storage worker. They had upper secondary education but no knowledge of the Norwegian educational system. Alex also had a 21 year old brother.

Alex had attended three schools for his lower secondary education – Grønskog, Gulhuset and Nordsogn. He had always found school difficult; he enjoyed meeting his friends and he enjoyed gym, but he found work, in general, a struggle. Homework, especially, was a problem because there was no one at home to ask. He also felt isolated being so far away from his friends and the travelling was tiresome. Alex described how his experiences with school had worsened as he had gotten older. The more that was asked of him, the more difficult he found it. He described himself as lazy and easily distracted by television, good weather and the like. He said he thought he was humorous, dashing and a nice person but probably a little too self-involved which didn't help matters.

When asked whether ***Vannsjø*** was his first choice of school Alex said,

> Well, I didn't actually have choices, I forgot to choose a school and then my guidance counsellor pulled me in one day and said 'Alex, you haven't chosen a school' and then, OK, I was a little freaked out because it was the last day and I had to, and I had forgotten to read the booklet, so he said 'OK I'll show you some school' and I picked that and that and that and flipped a coin and this ended up to be my first choice. It's all by chance.

When asked whether he was happy at ***Vannsjø*** he replied, "You can't think about the alternatives". He said that he was advised by the school, they told him his education was important, but he didn't listen as he wasn't concerned with the future. Also, there was no point in telling his parents about the school or the subjects.

Now in his third year he has been studying maths, physics and IT. He hadn't wanted to study a vocational subject because he did not want to work with manual labour when he is older. Instead he described how he fell into his subject choices. His maths grades were good and physics was interesting. However, he wanted to change them at the beginning of his third year because he no longer felt he was any good at them. Having left it too late, the other classes were full and it was not possible for him to change. Even so, Alex would really like to study 'astrology' at university after his military service and maths and physics would be prerequisites for such a course.

When asked whether he was happy with his choices, Alex said that he wished he had taken English and may be French. He wished he had not chosen physics or IT – IT was boring and he didn't need it. He also described how he struggled with the workload. "It is overwhelming. May be it's just

because I'm lazy. I don't know. I try to do the work but I just can't manage. I try but I'm not very organised. I tend to forget a lot of things".

16 months later – It was not possible to contact Alexander but a fellow pupil, Arild, said he had spent the previous year in military service as a guard patrolling the palace grounds in the centre of Oslo.

Vignette 11 - *Ming Yee – Vannsjø videregående skole*

Ming Yee lived with her Chinese parents and one of her sisters. Her mother was a seamstress with her own clothes shop, her father a cook. They had moved to Norway some years previously and neither of them had an upper secondary education. Ming Yee had one older sister who was physically disabled and two younger sisters. She was the only one to study in *videregående skole*. She worked hard to get good grades as she saw this as the only way to secure future opportunities. In addition to her school work she worked, reluctantly, at her mother's shop.

Ming Yee described how she had always valued education; it was something her parents had instilled in her. In fact, she knew that she had to study at *videregående skole* because her parents would have been very unhappy if she had chosen any other alternative. They wanted her to have an academic career and consequently she was planning to become a dentist. She knew she would have to study at university and that, largely as a result of the competition for places, she knew the entrance requirement was high. In order to achieve this goal she chose maths, physics and chemistry as her *studieretning* for two years. She said that she had always hated maths and the sciences and thought very much about the arts but her parents did not support this option and now, she too felt it was a better choice because one could not go far with a job in the arts. She described how sad she felt because she didn't enjoy her subjects since she wasn't doing well in them. She also suggested that she would have to make herself enjoy them because she was going to be applying her subject choices to her career for the rest of her life. In giving advice to others about making their choices Ming Yee said, "First I would tell them that they have to choose thing they are interested in and they like to do it because this is a thing you have to do the rest of your life and, yes, you achieve them better when you do thing you like and not because of anybody else say it".

Ming Yee made her choices about which school to attend at the end of *ungdomsskole*. She did not receive much support and felt that the only information she was given was a catalogue with all the schools and their grades. She considered ***Vannsjø*** first and attended it for the first two months of the first year. She was put off by the ugly building and instead chose Oksen *videregående* because her best friend also studied there. However, she found it difficult to travel an hour each way, and also felt isolated because there were very few pupils from ethnic minorities there. At the end of her first year she changed back to ***Vannsjø***.

When asked if she was happy with her choices, Ming Yee said that yes, she was happy but she was also sad that she was doing so poorly in so many of her subjects. She believed she would get a 4.7 or a 4.8 but she needed a 5.0. She said that she would have to take top-up courses at the science faculty at university in order to support her application because she would have an insufficient number of points to apply for dentistry based upon her upper secondary qualification alone. This would mean that her education could be delayed by two or three years.

Ming Yee had no positive experience which she wished to re-tell, but she spoke much about the pressures of being in school and how depressed she had been throughout. She had received help from the school guidance counsellor and from the county Educational and Psychological Services. She had received counselling for over a year but did not feel it had helped her. Instead, she now felt that she had to deal with it on her own and had stopped attending the sessions. She had kept studying throughout but had often been very close to dropping out. She felt her parents would be very shocked if they had known about this and how serious her depression had become.

12 months later – It was not possible to contact *Ming Yee* but a fellow student said that she was now working as a dental assistant.

Vignette 12 – *Arild – Vannsjø videregående skole*

Arild lived with his mother, an advertising executive, and his father who, after 12 years pursuing various studies, worked as a senior librarian at the zoological museum in Oslo. Arild also had a 28 year old brother who had studied in upper secondary school and now worked as a computer engineer for a local software company. Arild spent much of his time working on his computer at home but he also enjoyed martial arts. He felt it was particularly amusing as he was double-jointed and so, when practising ju-jitsu, he was able to manoeuvre himself out of joint-locks easily. This physical condition also prevented him from participating in military service; he was not disappointed about this.

Arild attended Nordsogn *ungdomsskole* where he had been 'teacher's pet'. He was very keen on computers and happy to help his teachers. He enjoyed the privileges that such a relationship bestowed although he felt frustrated by an educational system that withheld choice until upper secondary school except for whether to study French or German. He didn't like to be forced to learn things and, although he valued education now, because he saw the importance of a shared knowledge in order to communicate with others in society, in the past he had never really cared about remembering facts. His preferences lay with maths and the sciences rather than history and languages.

When it came to choosing a school Arild thought about applying to Steinfjell, a very prestigious school in the centre of Oslo. However, he chose *Vannsjø* because it was only four minutes walk from his home. *Vannsjø* also had a reputation for allowing pupils to dress as they wished, to say what they wanted, and to have the political opinions that they wanted. This was important to Arild, especially since he chose to wear black face paint and had a special dress sense that clearly made a statement about his personality. In the end, Arild chose *Vannsjø* as his first choice, Steinfjell as his second, and Svarthole, where his brother had studied, as his third.

Arild secured a place at *Vannsjø* but soon regretted this. He describes how his first two years at the school were very unhappy. He felt that the entrance requirement was so low that people came even though they didn't want to stay on but were forced to by their parents. Many of the pupils could not speak Norwegian properly, pupils used their mobile phones in class, and during one incident water pistols were fired in the class leaving puddles of water on the floor. He described how the teachers hated his class – "…. It was just a mess, I think. It seems that they just put people in the classes and the rest of them they stashed into ours so we got all the junk". He did think about changing school but feared that it would be even more difficult to join another class who had been together a year already. He was also concerned that he had learnt so little during his first year that he might trail behind new classmates. Luckily, at the end of the second year half his class dropped out and were replaced with pupils who had been studying in England for a year. This change altered the social dynamics in the class and Arild felt much happier.

Arild's *studieretning* had been maths, physics and IT for two years. He hadn't sought any advice from the school since his father was a librarian and able to carry out a lot of research for him. Arild planned to study a degree in cybernetics and needed to know which subject choices were important for this plan. He had discovered that if he were to remain in the same university for the five year duration of the course he must secure a place at the University of Trondheim in the west of Norway. If this wasn't possible, he would study at the University of Oslo for three years and then apply to Trondheim to fill the spaces in the five year course where students had dropped out.

When asked whether he was happy with his choices, Arild described many frustrations with his experiences. He wished he had chosen German instead of French because he didn't learn enough French for it to be useful and because his class were unable to complete the course because no one understood it. He had a difficult relationship with his RE teacher who described him as 'self-destructive' and a 'satanist' because of the way he dressed. He was unhappy with the behaviour grade as a means of disciplining pupils as he felt that the real issue was about forcing people to study compulsory subjects. He was unhappy with the need for compulsory attendance at school since it prevented pupils from working at home and progressing at their own pace. He also felt frustrated that his final upper secondary qualification required him to pass all courses even though

many of the subjects had no bearing upon the subject he would be studying at university. Arild described how he felt completely separated from the rest of his class. He did not understand the fixation on labels and music, excessive drinking and partying each weekend. He felt alienated by them and hoped that he would not have contact with any of them at university.

16 months later – Arild had just begun his second year in a degree course at the University of Oslo where he was studying cybernetics. He complained that even at this level he had many compulsory courses but was happy that at least of half of his subjects were interesting and gave him an idea of what he would like to study in the future. He had a further three years of study in Oslo and then hoped to study an MSc in cybernetics at the University of Trondheim. As for his long term goal, he didn't really know - "I just want to build robots".

Vignette 13 – *Tonje – Sæther videregående skole*

Tonje's mother was born in Australia but was raised in Norway. Tonje described herself as 'half Australian' and spoke of her family there and her plans to travel there at the end of her upper secondary education to study international communication. She had spent her whole life living in Teledal, a four hour drive from Oslo, with her mother, an administrator, and her unemployed Norwegian stepfather. She also had a 21 year old brother who had completed his military service in Norway and then moved to Australia. She looked forward to spending more time with him.

Tonje hadn't enjoyed the academic subjects in her *ungdomsskole*. She hadn't focused on her education until she was 16 and the realisation that she needed good grades to get into *videregående skole*. Nevertheless, she always planned to continue her education. Instead, she looked to a course in media which the school counsellor had heard about. She notes, "Since it was the first year that they had this course at this school it was kind of a gambling, coming here, because no body knew anything and no matter who you called you didn't get any information so it was kind of like, 'OK, I'll just go for it'". Also, it was not known whether the course would run for three years as only the first two years had been verified with the option for some of the pupils to spend their second year in a college in England. Tonje did not see this as a problem as it would always be possible for her to take the *påbygging* course in her third year, an academic course which provides pupils with the *studiekompetanse*. This would be instead of the integrated vocational/academic third year which, as it turned out, was verified before the pupils reached their final year.

Tonje had lived all her life in Teledal and wasn't sure about being in Oslo and taking a new course. She had applied to Teledal *videregående skole* as well as to ***Sæther***. In fact, she spent her first day at ***Sæther*** and her second at Teledal but decided that an assignment about communication was better than one about French and so chose ***Sæther*** – "....the first assignment that we got, that made me decide". She also thought it was easy to leave Teledal because she had no friends there. Later

reflecting upon choice she notes that she is happy with her decisions but she wouldn't have been happy if she hadn't been to England. Being in *Sæther* for three years would be too much; Norwegian winters in a large grey school would be too depressing.

Tonje felt very disappointed about the course. She said that *Sæther* was the only place that offered media and communication at the time and because it was the first time the course had been run she was excusing them. "There is a lot of negative as well but I just, I don't focus on them but I don't think my view is average for my group because I think most of the people are just here because this was the course that they had the grades to get into and because it was the one that sounded most fun and because all their friends go to this school". She noted that because it was the first year, there was no prior *gjennomsnitt* to determine the entrance requirement and so, with 30 spaces available, if only 20 applied, everyone would be secured a place regardless of their grades. She suggested that most of the others had tried to accept their situation and were making the most of it but that they found it difficult to focus on what was positive about it. Tonje tried to be philosophical about the situation. She felt she had learnt a lot about how the course had been prepared and in helping with its construction. She and her classmates had also been able to give feedback, especially in the first year when it clearly wasn't working.

17 months later – After leaving school, *Tonje*, worked for *Medecins sans Frontieres* for six months before moving to Australia to study a degree in international communication. She secured a scholarship at Macquarie University where 25% of her tuition fees were paid. However, she describes her first semester as awful since she had no idea what was expected of her academically and, as a result, her grades were low and she nearly lost the scholarship. Also during that semester she came to realise that living apart from her brother for many years had broken the connection between them; she missed him very much. Now in her second semester, her situation has greatly improved and she looked forward to next year when she would be spending five months in Cairo and later a second placement in either the States, Germany or Italy. At the end of her studies she hoped to find employment, or at least, work experience, in diplomacy. She also spoke of the possibility of travelling more or studying for a PhD. She says, "I'm very happy with all my choices, and even though they have sometimes not been made with the best judgement or motives or just been wrong, I would not have changed them as I have learned from them and that is the most important thing.....I feel good about where I am in my life, not for the things I am doing but where my life will go. I feel like my life has just started and I am figuring out and choosing the things I want to incorporate into my life".

Vignette 14 – *Olav – Nesby videregående skole*

Olav felt that he was an open person, creative and tolerant of others' viewpoints. However, he was badly organised and often lazy when not motivated. He also felt it had taken him a long time to

think about his future and his life beyond his current experiences. He had attended Ringedal *ungdomsskole* near his home where he lived with his Danish parents and older brother. He had an older sister also who did not live at home. Both his siblings were studying in higher education, one at the University of Oslo and the other at the High School. His mother was a nurse and his father a computer consultant. Olav enjoyed watching movies, painting and visiting museums.

Olav loved art; he said he had no other interests. He said, "This was the only thing I could study and still want to go to school cos I'm not a fan of school". When he started in upper secondary he had really enjoyed a course in art history and as a result of this had decided that he would like to become an art teacher. He was, therefore, pleased that the art course included the academic subjects which would give him the opportunity to later study at university. Although he was frustrated at the number of compulsory subjects he had to study he viewed it pragmatically in the sense that he needed them in order to achieve his goal even if he wouldn't need them in his future daily life.

Olav's first choice of school was Blomstrud because it was close to where he lived. He didn't get in but, instead, was accepted at his second choice, Bordhandel *videregående*. He had been there two years and had had a good time, meeting lots of people. He did not secure a place there in his final year and thus, now, in his third year, he was at *Nesby*.

Olav felt frustrated at the choices he had received. He felt that he had made the best of a bad job. He had been pleased with the art course to begin with but had felt that the people on his course were only there because they couldn't get onto any other course – "So then may be only one or two are really interested in that subject. The others take it because it's easy to get in. It's much easier than *allmenn*". He described friends who were studying music elsewhere and who had been auditioned before they were accepted onto the course. For his course, entry was based entirely on the *gjennomsnitt* and, therefore, the artistic talents of the group were limited.

Olav also felt devastated to discover, after having decided that he wanted to gain an education, that he was unable to keep up with the demands of his courses. "When I understood that I wanted to get an education, I want to get a job but I'm not able to. I don't.... I think I did a wrong choice when I started at *videregående* cos I'm not able to follow up what I should do to be in all the classes to get the grades to work at home". He was asked whether he had chosen the wrong course or whether he was not capable of attaining the grades. Olav replied, "I was not prepared to, what I was going into, how hard it would be, how it would be set up. I thought I had an imagination about how it was going to be. It didn't turn out that way so I was kind of surprised".

In hindsight Olav felt it would have been better to study art alone without the academic subjects even though this was not an option offered by the educational system. He was sad that if he failed at upper secondary school he would never be able to study art again because it would be impossible to repeat those three years. This meant that he would only be able to study it in higher education. It was imperative, therefore, that he pass all his academic courses and achieve his upper secondary qualification. He thought he would work for a year first, take a long holiday, travel, and then possibly take some art courses in the evening. He could also re-sit individual subjects and gain a secondary certificate in his academic courses. In this way, he might one day be able to study at university and become an art teacher.

16 months later – *Olav* had failed his Norwegian exams and, therefore, not passed his upper secondary certificate. Since leaving school he had been working in a television and kitchen equipment store whilst maintaining his interest in painting in his spare time. He still planned to train as an art teacher at university but could not do this for another year. Instead, he hoped to re-sit his Norwegian exams by registering with a private school just for the exam.

Vignette 15 – *Chanette – Nesby videregående skole*

Chanette lived with her mother, father, 12 year old brother, and 4 year old sister. Her mother was an art director and her father held a senior post in an electrical company. Chanette described herself as able to listen to others, bossy, but often a good leader. She enjoyed spending time with her friends and boyfriend and enjoyed playing basketball. She was also on the *Russ* board.

Chanette had always enjoyed her education but had never really thought about its educational purpose – it had been more about meeting her friends. She had never had to take responsibility for her own learning. Even in the last year of lower secondary she was more focused upon how exciting it was to be leaving lower secondary rather than thinking about the future – "I didn't realise, I think I thought 'Oh yeah, it's going to be OK, I'm going to get where I want to'. I didn't realise the seriousness of it".

Chanette hoped to study drama at Dyreborg *videregående skole*. Her parents were supportive and told her not to follow her friends who were all choosing to study the academic courses. She read the catalogue and made her choices making art at Bordhandel her second choice and art at *Nesby* her third. That Summer, whilst on holiday she rang in to the central office to hear the automated recording – she would not be studying drama at her first choice but instead art at Bordhandel. Chanette said she cried and was upset for a long time afterwards. "I was really really sad. It was a shock".

Chanette started an arts course at Bordhandel and came to like it there. However, after two years she was told that she could not continue her education there. She liked the teachers and knew people there – "It was never my choice to change". "The teachers said to me 'We like you as a student and we would like to have you here the last year' and they appreciate students that go there three years but 'We can't do anything with your grades and you're not good enough for our school so we have to let you go. It's not the school who decides, it's the system'".

Chanette then moved to *Nesby* to complete her upper secondary education. She noted how the system used to reward those who chose schools close in proximity to their home. Now travelling to *Nesby*, however, she travelled over an hour in each direction with some classes starting at 8.00. She also complained at the system of allocation to course and school based solely on grades. "In my class it's like, three or four students that want to go further on with arts. The rest 'Oh, it was the only thing I could get into because of my grades'. I think it's a lot of that actually".

Chanette's course included the *påbygging* programme, that is, a vocational course with academic subjects in the final year to provide the student with the *studiekompetanse* in order to gain access to higher education. However, she believed she would fail her maths. This would mean that she would not get the full upper secondary certificate. She worried about how she would cope with re-sitting it saying that she would have to attend another school privately to do this.

At the end of her education her main focus was being on the *Russ* board. When asked why she continued to pursue activities other than her school work, even though she was aware that she needed to focus on her studies, she said,

> Of course I should have used all my time at school.... I think I have started to don't care as much and I'm not, I don't think school is my thing. I really, I've never been good at sitting on the school bench and listening to the teacher. I'm not that kind of person..... I think it's sad that it should be so much about grades cos it's so many other ways that you can learn things and become just as smart and you know, I think, I think it's stupid that grades should have so much to say cos it kind of destroying of other experiences.

Chanette's plans for the future were to apply to a theatre school where pupils did not need qualifications so that she could pursue an education in drama after all. She said, "I tried to tell myself 'May be it wasn't your thing' but I think it is". She would also like to study leadership at university but would need to pass her maths first.

12 months later – It was not possible to contact *Chanette* again.

Vignette 16 – *Ragnhild – Oppstrøm videregående skole*

Ragnhild was fun-loving although she admitted she could also become physically aggressive. She lived with her mother, father and 15 year old sister. Her mother was a receptionist and her father an office worker at the central benefits office. Ragnhild had attended Boresund *ungdomsskole* and then chosen to study at ***Solfjell videregående skole.*** She was an able pupil and committed to her studies, but equally committed to earning her own living. She spent all of her spare time working in a news kiosk.

Ragnhild had begun her upper secondary education at ***Solfjell videregående skole.*** It was close to her home and her best friends had chosen to study there. She had thought about studying cooking but she thought she would probably want to study at university and didn't believe that she could do so unless she studied the academic course. She didn't know about the additional academic year which provides pupils on vocational courses with the possibility of gaining the *studiekompetanse* in order to gain access to higher education and so she opted for the academic '*allmennlinje*'. She said, "I told myself and everyone that if I knew I would have taken something else but now I don't regret it really, it's OK".

Ragnhild completed her first year at ***Solfjell*** before spending her second year at a college in England. Upon her return to Norway she found that her two good friends in ***Solfjell*** had changed school. The class from England, mainly ***Oppstrøm*** pupils, had developed a strong connection and Ragnhild had made many good friends there. If the class were to remain as a group in their third year they needed 20 pupils otherwise they would be split between other classes in their year group. Ragnhild and some other pupils from different schools decided, therefore, to change to ***Oppstrøm***. The only problem with such a choice is that she must now travel 45 minutes to get to school each morning.

Ragnhild described how difficult she had found the decision-making process. She said, "When I chose to go to *videregående*, everyone told me that I had to, but I wanted to as well". She spoke with the school guidance counsellor who told her to make her own choices and not listen to others but still she found it difficult to decide what to do. Her parents told her not to choose a career based on its salary and yet they discouraged her whenever she suggested any job that would be paid too poorly.

Ragnhild chose to study IT and social studies whilst in England. She continued with the social studies upon her return to ***Oppstrøm*** but dropped the IT because she was no longer interested in it. She found it difficult to decide where her preferences lay and what she should do with her future. Speaking of a cooking course again, she said, "Actually, I wanted to do everything and I'm glad I didn't do cooking cos that's not something that interests me anymore and that's why I think it's so

hard to make a choice now because what sounds interesting for me now is not something I'm going to like working with the rest of my life".

Having "no idea what I want to work with" Ragnhild has decided to apply for various courses at university which seem interesting to her - a foundational course in psychology at the University of Oslo and information and culture at Oslo High School. She has also looked into becoming a journalist or a teacher. She believed she would secure a place on the psychology foundational course, a prerequisite for entry onto a psychology degree programme. Although there is a great deal of competition for such places she felt that the foundational year in itself would be beneficial anyway since it could contribute towards another degree if she were to choose a related subject.

16 months later – *Ragnhild* had just completed the first year of a degree in sociology at the University of Oslo. She wanted to move out of Oslo and so was transferring to the University of Trondheim where she would complete the degree. She described how difficult she had found it to decide upon an education after completing her upper secondary schooling – should she go to folkehøgskole for a year, take a break, or continue with her studies immediately. She had also decided to stay in Oslo because of her boyfriend but the relationship had since ended. She wished she had begun her course in Trondheim from the beginning; it had not been easy to arrange the transfer.

Vignette 17 – *Maria – Solfjell videregående skole*

Maria lived with her mother, father and twelve year old brother. Her mother held a senior research post working with medicines in a veterinary company and her father was a professor of pharmacology at Oslo's veterinary school. Maria described herself as able to work hard; she had learnt that you can always get what you want if you put your mind to it. She studied much of the time but did enjoy playing football and worked on the weekends at a local optician's.

Ringedal *ungdomsskole* had not been a good experience for Maria. There had been a lot of pressure about what clothes were worn and what grades were achieved. She felt that it was difficult to be an able pupil and was relieved that in her upper secondary school she was amongst other academic pupils. She had chosen to study the academic line because she did not have a career in mind which she could aim towards. Her goal was to keep her options open. She chose to study at ***Solfjell*** because she knew it was a good school. She wanted to be in an inspiring environment where it was acceptable to work at her education. It was also important to choose a school where she knew not many of her classmates at *ungdomsskole* would go.

Maria enjoyed Norwegian and RE in lower secondary, but "not the 'number' subjects". Therefore, her preferences didn't influence her choices in upper secondary. She chose the easier of the two

maths options, biology, chemistry, English and French. She had made her choices because she felt that having a background in the sciences provided her with more options in the future. "Yes, because, especially maths and those kind of subjects because if you have, if you are going to get a good education there's, you almost, there's a lot of things you have to have been through..... I would never have chosen maths just because, because I don't like it but I think I have to because of later when I'm going to study".

Maria felt confused by the amount of choice available to her. She felt the number of possible combinations of subjects were misleading because, ultimately, certain combinations were necessary for your future education. She felt she lacked this knowledge and, therefore, did not know if she had made the right choices. Also, it was difficult for her to seek advice because she didn't really know what she wanted to study in the future anyway. A guidance counsellor in her *ungdomsskole* had told her, "'Oh, you have good grades, you can go wherever you want and do whatever you want'". Maria said, "That didn't help much".

Maria was very pleased that she had chosen to study biology but wished she had not chosen chemistry as she wasn't doing well in the subject. She didn't feel she was performing well in maths either which she had chosen in case she wanted to become a doctor or a vet. Now she wasn't certain about such plans. Instead she was going to spend the following year at a *folkehøgskole*, studying about nature and the environment and topics such as how to prepare food outside. She knew she wanted more education at university or *høyskole* but she did not know what.

15 months later – *Maria* had just begun a teaching degree at the University of Bergen. She had spent the previous year at a *folkehøgskole*, north of Oslo where she had studied 'outdoor activities'. She felt this year had been "really, really perfect". This course ended in late Spring, and in the months since she had been working in a store. She had thought about what she wanted to study during her year off and felt that her options were either to train as a vet and work with animals or to train as a teacher and work with people; she had chosen the latter. She hoped to become a teacher of Norwegian and work with upper secondary pupils and adults returning to education. It was a five year programme of study.

Vignette 18 – *Louise – Solfjell videregående skole*

Louise was born in Norway; her father was Norwegian but her mother was from an American/French background and Louise felt strong ties with this aspect of her cultural background. She lived with her mother, a senior health researcher at a private corporation where she investigated air pollution, her father, a civil economist, and her 14 year old sister. Louise felt one of her strengths was her ability to work hard. However, she was impatient, had low self-esteem

as a result of an episode of bullying in her *ungdomsskole*, and she found it difficult to accept comments from others, be they criticisms or compliments.

Louise had been planning her career since she was 12 year old. She described how people had thought she was dreaming when she first said she wanted to be an astronaut but six years later she was still planning it - "People are beginning to have faith in me". She described how she had been to Space Camp in Alabama. One girl and one boy from Norway are able to go each year. She was a Mission Specialist which is what she would like to be in the future and so she felt it was a good experience since it gave her a taster of what she was aiming for. Louise had also been on the national Norwegian news at the time of the Challenger accident. She is a member of two space clubs and through these a journalist had made contact with her to talk with her about her aspirations.

Louise's parents had taught her that education was important but she felt that having a goal was the most important factor. "I knew what I wanted to be and I saw education, and still do, as just a way to become what I want to be, realisation of a dream". She had become interested in space and worked out how it would be possible to achieve her goal. She would spend the next 10-15 years gaining the appropriate education and at any one time she knew where she was in making it come true.

When Louise was 15 she started to look at which school to attend. She always started planning early but she knew that if she were to become an astronaut she had to attend one of the very best schools in Oslo. She looked at Steinfjell and ***Solfjell*** and, although Steinfjell had a slightly better name, two of her friends were going to ***Solfjell*** and it was much closer to home. Her parents told her that it was more important to go somewhere with her friends than somewhere with a slightly better reputation. Louise had found it a difficult decision to make and in the end felt that it was more important to her to be in a liberal environment rather than amongst very competitive pupils as was the reputation of Steinfjell.

Louise had not enjoyed her lower secondary education. She felt that it hadn't been acceptable to be good at what you do and that you were supposed to be ashamed of your ability and to hide it. At ***Solfjell*** she felt satisfied because the other pupils were interested in their subjects, they had chosen to be there, and the lessons were more fun. In choosing which subjects to study, Louise also knew what she needed to learn.

> It's kind of weird, I, because I, probably if I didn't know what I wanted to be then the subjects I liked and disliked could have affected my choices at *videregående* much more than they did but I already knew what I wanted to be. That's why I sort of follow up the path that I'm supposed to take even without..... I mean, I didn't get very good grades in science and math in junior high and still that's the only subjects I picked now whereas history and English, I mean I chose away as soon as possible.

Louise was dissatisfied with the support she was given in lower secondary school. They had suggested that she attend the English school in Oslo because her planned education would be international. As she notes though, had she followed their advice she wouldn't be where she needs to be in terms of her goal. It was her parents who helped her get all the information she needed in order to know which choices to make in upper secondary school as a foundation for her later studies. Louise had found a double degree programme established through co-operation between the University of Trondheim in Norway and a French university. She would need three master's programmes followed by three years experience and then a doctorate at a university in the States.

15 months later – Louise was just beginning her second year on a degree programme at the University of Trondheim where she was enrolled on an MSc in civil engineering, physics and mathematics. She described how the official requirement to become an astronaut was a doctorate, but unofficially, it was two doctorates. She felt that she would have a broader and more practical education if she chose to study a series of master's degrees and a single PhD. Thus, after her three years at Trondheim, Louise planned to study an MSc in space technology at the International Space University in France followed by a broader MSc in space studies, also at a university in France. From there, Louise hoped to move to the USA to enrol on a doctoral programme. As before, she realised it was a long and elaborate pathway and that she may not secure her final goal. However, she felt that it was realistic to hope to work within the field of space even if it were not possible to become an astronaut.

Vignette 19 – Origins of research: A personal perspective

Since pupil perspective is the primary focus of this research, and since those whom I interviewed willingly gave so much of themselves in sharing their experiences, it seems only right and just that I should reciprocate. What follows is an outline of my background and the relevant influences that led me to this topic. It is possible for me to summarise this in a few lines but, in order to fully capture the process of decision-making, and to provide a very concrete example of how issues such as 'choice' and 'opportunity' are in fact quite complex, a fuller account seems justified.

Though born in Bristol, I grew up in a small village in South Wales. I was to be in the final cohort to sit 'O' levels before the introduction of the GCSE in 1988 and then, with little thought, decided to stay on in the sixth form to study 'A' levels in English, history and sociology. I made this decision in spite of great dissatisfaction with the subjects which were on offer and the quality of the

teaching available in some of those subject areas. The alternative was the local College of Further Education which was commonly believed to be an option for those who had gained poor grades in their O levels and so I did not believe it to be an option for me.

When I was 16 I developed an interest in psychology and later decided to study this at university. By the end of the degree I was very keen to become a 'psychologist' and after considering the possible options decided that educational psychology seemed the most straightforward career path to follow compared to other routes I might take. To qualify as an educational psychologist one must have, in addition to a degree in psychology, a teaching qualification, a minimum of two years teaching experience, and a Master's degree in educational psychology. I had a gap year following my degree before beginning a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) as part of the plan to train further within psychology.

Competition for teaching posts was fierce, particularly in my local area, with Welsh speakers having a distinct advantage over those who were not. Since I did not speak Welsh and had no particular yearnings to remain within Wales, I applied to several London boroughs where I felt it might be easier to secure a position. I was also terrified of the idea of moving so far from my roots and, therefore, felt it was something I should do. In addition, I was entirely focused upon getting the necessary experience so that I could apply for the Masters in educational psychology and, for this reason, I was neither concerned about the part of the country in which I taught nor the age group. Perhaps naively, I thought that I could make firm decisions at a later stage. In April 1994 I was invited to an interview in Hounslow and later offered a position as a Reception teacher. I accepted the post and began working as a class teacher the following September.

I enjoyed studying and regarded it as more of a hobby than a task. I therefore applied to follow an MA in education with the Open University (OU), feeling this would satisfy both personal and professional needs. The interesting part of my studies with the OU was the focus upon the use of an action research paradigm. This was very new to me, particularly set against my psychology training with its emphasis upon quantitative methods. Moreover, I felt that I was able to take a more mature and considered approach towards the methodology compared to the unquestioned commitment to quantitative methods fostered in me in my undergraduate degree.

I taught in London for two years; the first year in a Reception class and the second in Year 2. I soon began to feel that a single class teacher could not possibly meet the needs of all his/her pupils, that the system made too many demands upon young children with the introduction of increased assessment, and that the state system had little respect for teachers. I felt that in staying in teaching I condoned a system I did not agree with. Consequently, in August 1996, with other personal

circumstances to motivate me, I moved to Cambridge to work as a research assistant at the University of Cambridge on a two year project investigating language disorders in children.

It was at Cambridge that I met my husband - a Norwegian student who was soon to return to his home country and a new job in Oslo. I managed to secure a teaching position in a private English-speaking international school in Oslo, teaching five-six year olds and so, when my contract with the language project ended, I too moved to Oslo. This was intended as a short-term measure - the intention being that my husband and I would return to Britain in order that I could pursue a career in educational psychology at a later stage. In the meantime I studied a Postgraduate Diploma in Special Education with the OU (I had completed the MA the year before) and applied to various British universities to enlist on the Master's programme in educational psychology. I was unsuccessful in all my applications but, by this stage, the diploma was giving me reason to doubt such a career path. I was also very happy living in Oslo although, again, dissatisfied with teaching. If I were to apply to the Master's programmes in educational psychology for a second time I believed I would have to return to teaching within the British educational system in order to gain more practical experience in special education and I was not prepared to do this.

At this stage, therefore, at the age of 28, I was at a point of transition in my life. I was once again unhappy with teaching, I had no apparent career plans in mind, and I was living in a country which I very much loved but in which I could not secure employment because of my limited language skills. I was an educationalist in practice and mentality but I felt I could not teach. Fortunately, my husband was in a position to financially support me and encouraged me to do what I clearly enjoyed best - studying and researching education. The University of Oslo was running an MPhil programme in Comparative and International Education, aimed at English-speakers. There are no course fees in higher education in Norway and, with a residency permit, and having paid tax in the previous 12 months, I was also eligible to apply for student loans. And so, quite by chance, my connection with comparative education was fostered.

Since I had abandoned educational psychology, largely for the same reasons that I abandoned teaching, and was now embarking upon my second Master's degree, a PhD was naturally a goal to aim for. I began discussing this with one of my lecturers who was extremely encouraging but who suggested it may be simpler for me to apply to a British university. I had become very much interested by the taught components of the course with topics such as globalisation, neo-liberalist economic policy, curriculum theories, and the impact of educational reform upon individual pupils. With many of these reforms occurring in upper secondary education and with my concerns about injustice in the system it seemed natural for me to wonder about the topic from the perspective of the student. I made my application and, evidently, was offered and accepted a place at the University of Bristol.

Now, six years after embarking on the PhD, this thesis has come to an end. It has been a mammoth task particularly since, in this time, I have also had three children. I now find myself at a juncture once again when choices and opportunities are open to me. Having studied such a topic, I feel far less constrained by pressures to succeed and to choose expected pathways. I have come to believe that where I have 'ended up' has been influenced largely by practical constraints, luck, my own determination to make something work, and perhaps an awareness of my place in society. After all, I am a white educated female from a middle class background who grew up in a working class community. I feel that this context both constrained and liberated me.

Appendix 15 - Phase III – Follow-Up Data

The following section provides a brief outline of the findings relating to the third and final phase of the study.

Introduction

The third phase of the study was conducted in Autumn 2004 and Spring 2005, that is, two academic years after the interviews of Phase II. This stage was not conducted as a means of answering a specific research question but, instead, had two particular aims (i) to establish where the pupils were in relation to their earlier plans and, (ii) to address any particular issues that had arisen in the analyses of the interviews. As noted previously, the issue of support was a central concern which demanded further consideration. The findings of Phase III are described below under the headings (i) *Pupil Plans* and (ii) *Guidance and Support.*

(i) Pupil Plans

At the time of the interviews, pupils were asked if they would agree to participate in a follow up stage at some point in the future. Of the 68 participants, 65 provided contact telephone numbers or e-mail addresses. Of these 65 pupils, it was possible to contact 54 for participation in the follow up stage of the study, that is, 79.4% of the original interview sample (25 English pupils, 29 Norwegian). Specific numbers per school are given in Chapter Three, table 2. When contacted, pupils were reminded of the original study. They were asked what they had done following their upper secondary education, what they were currently doing, and future aspirations. Those whose experiences were re-told as vignettes (see Appendix 14) were asked more explicit questions, for example, whether they were happy with their choices. These questions are presented at the end of this appendix.

The aim of the follow up stage was to establish whether pupils' original plans cohered with their eventual actions. In *most* instances this meant whether the pupil later went on to university and whether they were studying their planned field of interest, although many pupils had also spoken of travelling abroad. Whether pupils were studying at their planned institution was not taken into consideration since this was unlikely to affect their intended career path. This decision was also made to avoid unnecessary complexities in the data. The results are presented in the table below:-

Table 61 Measure of planning realisation by country

	Plans realised (%)	Plans not realised (%)	Total
England	72.0	28.0	25
Norway	41.4	58.6	29
Total	30	24	54

From these figures it is apparent that, up to two years after the interview, the English pupils were far more likely to realise their original plans than the Norwegian pupils. In well over half of Norwegian cases, there was a discrepancy between what they thought they might do following their studies and what they later went on to do. Before it is possible to make any suggestions about the reason for this, it is worth considering the nature of the discrepancy in the pupils' plans.

Those whose plans had not been realised generally fell into one of three categories – (a) they had made a very slight change to their original plans, for example, chosen to study a similar or slightly different subject, (b) they described themselves as hindered in their original plans, most often by insufficient grades, but that they still aimed to achieve their goal, or (c) they had completely changed or abandoned their original plans and accepted the change. This data is presented below with information available for 23 of the 24 pupils whose actions and plans did not cohere.

Table 62 Reasons for pupils not realising their plans in England and Norway (a)

	(a) Plans altered (%)	(b) Plans hindered (%)	(c) Plans abandoned (%)	Total
England	42.9	0	57.1	7
Norway	50.0	43.8	6.3	16
Total	11	7	5	23

In looking at those who simply altered their plans slightly the English and Norwegian pupils appear to be comparable. In both samples, approximately half of the pupils fell into this category although clearly this is a more common occurrence in Norway given the larger numbers who fail to achieve their original plans.

The particularly interesting findings relate to categories (b) and (c). None of the English pupils described themselves as hindered (category b) in their original plans – they either achieved them immediately or they abandoned them (category c). This differs from the Norwegian pupils where pupils are more likely to suggest they were hindered (category b) but very few, in fact, only one pupil actually abandoned their plans (category c).

In order to make the comparison between the English and Norwegian pupils more explicit the data is presented as a percentage of all participants within each country rather than only those who did not realise their plans.

Table 63 Reasons for pupils not realising their plans in England and Norway (b)

	(a) Plans altered (%)	(b) Plans hindered (%)	(c) Plans abandoned (%)	Plans realised	Total
England	12.0	0	16.0	72.0	25
Norway	28.6	25.0	3.6	42.9	28
Total	11	7	5	30	53

These findings suggest that English and Norwegian pupils make plans about their future in very different ways. For the English, their plans were much firmer, and at the time of the original interviews, their decision-making had reached the stage of taking decisive action towards those plans. For the Norwegians, however, they were still at the stage of exploring what they hoped to achieve and what was appropriate for them. There may be two reasons for these discrepancies. Firstly, the English system promotes a very clear-cut approach in respect to when choices are made. This compares with the more open-ended approach of the Norwegian system. It is more likely that the Norwegian pupils could return to their original plans to study some years after upper secondary schooling than in England. Secondly, it may reflect the level of support offered to pupils whilst in school and the help they received in making their plans. Whilst it seems positive that decision-making can be realistically delayed, as in the Norwegian system, it seems a little disturbing that many pupils, 25% of the entire Norwegian sample, remained 'hindered' up to two years after the original interview, suggesting that they may not actually go on to achieve their goals but that they had not yet come to accept this position. On the other hand, 16.0% of the English sample had abandoned their plans, which does not seem to be a positive outcome either.

(ii) Guidance and Support

With the analyses of the pupil interviews it became apparent that the issue of support and how it was perceived by the pupils was a crucial factor in this study. Consequently, it was decided to explore further the actual nature of the support pupils received at the end of their lower secondary education, that is, the actual point of transition from compulsory into post-16 education.

Four schools that catered to the lower secondary age group were contacted in England and Norway. The two English schools were, in fact, those which had participated in the upper secondary stage of the study, that is, **Eddington** and **Stepleigh**. Two Norwegian schools in Oslo were randomly chosen, one teaching the full age range (6-16 years), ***Gulleråsen barne-og-ungdomsskole***, and the other teaching only the lower secondary years (13-16 years), ***Grønnmyra ungdomsskole***. In the English schools, the two careers co-ordinators were interviewed, whilst in the Norwegian schools, two guidance counsellors (*rådgiver*), one deputy head (*inspektør*) and one social teacher (*sosiallærer*) were interviewed – a total, therefore, of six representatives. Each interview was semi-structured, guided by three common questions.

1. Could you give me a description of the process of choosing an upper secondary school and course? Does this support include careers advice?
2. How smoothly is this process experienced by the pupils, for example, how many seek advice? How many are satisfied or dissatisfied with the support?
3. Do you believe the process could be changed or improved in any way?

The results of the interviews are described below under the headings, *the experience of support,* and *improvements.* These interviews also contributed to the process of support outlined in Chapter Four, sections 4.6.

England

The experience of support

The guidance counsellors in England both felt that the pupil experience of support was generally a positive one although they recognised that it may not always be recalled as such. They supposed that lack of individual support might underpin any dissatisfaction. One of the counsellors noted that the support is a whole process and a framework provided by the school rather than a single event – "It is a general ethos of understanding yourself" (Colin Richards, **Stepleigh**). Therefore, pupils may not fully appreciate exactly where the support lies.

It was also felt that pupils may not be ready to make decisions or to take responsibility for their future choices. Gwen Griffiths at **Eddington** noted that, "They are not always awake to different possibilities" and similarly, Colin Richards noted, "You can put all the support mechanisms in place and if they're not prepared or not old enough, or mature enough or ready enough to sort of make decisions, but they have to don't they, at 16, you know, they have to think". Nevertheless, both counsellors were happy with the number of pupils who had plans and had implemented their choices by the age of 16.

Improvements

The counsellors did not feel the support system needed any major changes in order to improve it. Apart from a demand for greater resources including access to a wider number of outside speakers and more computers, the greatest concern was in the amount of individual support pupils received. Although pupils will receive individual support from their tutors in which they can discuss their educational progress generally, there is no single interview which focuses upon educational choices. It was also felt that the focus by Connexions was better placed with careers advice rather than the recent focus upon disaffected pupils. School counsellors are not usually in a position to offer individual support since they are often subject teachers for most of their timetable.

One of the counsellors, Colin Richards, suggested that a major improvement in the system had come with the introduction of a greater number of vocational courses, both at pre-16 and post-16 education. He felt that this provided pupils with real choices. "I think what's happened with choices, it's mushroomed hasn't it.....now the choice is much bigger cos there's so many more vocational courses at different levels suitable to their ability so, it's improved in a way because the choice has improved so that their perception of what they can do is better, I think, they make sensible choices because of it".

'Connexions'

Two representatives from the English organisation, 'Connexions' were interviewed during Phase II of the study. It seems appropriate to include some of the information they provided at this stage in the thesis.

'Connexions' is a relatively new organisation, developed out of the existing careers advisory service. It was launched as a government initiative and has evolved in its role in recent years. Its focus is upon the 13-19 year age group and its aim is to provide a more holistic service such that the needs of all individuals are met and, in particular, those who are disaffected by the system or need additional support. This means that it connects with other agencies such as social services, schools, religious groups, and so on, and that the personal advisors working within 'Connexions' may be required to explore issues of housing, family problems, motivation, careers choices, substance abuse, school exclusion, and so forth. Thus, the perception of 'Connexions' as a careers organisation reflects its historical role rather than its current one. David Hopkins notes, "If they're in school, in a way, they're not so much of an issue really....A lot of our time is actually supporting with the broader areas outside of the school environment....The real challenge and our targets are actually to make sure people are engaging in education, employment and training, so that's the focus of our work".

The difficulty with this system is that 'Connexions' now comes to identify a number of problems it would not previously have had contact with. A consequence of this new role is that the organisation is perceived as a solution to problems of overload elsewhere in the system. "I think there's a feel as well, in some areas, that while we're there to help the individual we're also, if we're not careful, trying to plug gaps in failing systems. So, like social services are overworked therefore.... Hitherto some of the things they have a responsibility for, the personal advisors get involved with cos the social worker can't deal with it" (David Hopkins). Furthermore, 'Connexions' is charged with responsibility for creating a national database so that all young people are tracked once they leave school. This proves to be a problematic goal since there is a lack of communication between the various agencies and thus individuals apparently disappear and personal advisors are then required to spend time trying to re-establish contact.

Norway

The experience of support

On the whole all those interviewed in Norway felt that the process of making a choice was experienced smoothly by the pupils. They suggested that there were always a few pupils who were dissatisfied for various reasons but that this was a very small minority. It was suggested that dissatisfaction might arise from not knowing what they wanted to do with their lives. Arne Røkke, guidance counsellor at ***Grønnmyra ungdomsskole*** noted, "They are not used to making decisions

for themselves". Many will go on to choose the academic line of study in preparation for university because they do not know which career to pursue even though their grades would suggest the academic option an unwise one. Pupils are encouraged to recognise that they will change with time and that it may be better to delay the choice to study academic subjects.

Another issue raised by Annette Furu, guidance counsellor at ***Gulleråsen barne-og-ungdomsskole***, is the nature of the support and outside pressures which influence pupil decision-making. She felt that parents and society constrained pupils. Instead she aimed to guide pupils by encouraging them to follow their dreams, to distrust school assessments, and to recognise that their lives and abilities will change with time. "You have to find out where your highest energy is, what are your dreams? What are your wishes and trust that and not be so scared about deciding that you have to take that, you have to be a plumber because your father is a plumber and that's the only safe education, you have to go to university because that's the only safe way because if you don't like it it's not a safe way, it's a catastrophe". Further, she suggested that society is changing so rapidly that adults cannot truly prepare young people for the future. She suggested that dissatisfaction in pupils may come from experiencing very strict guidance about future plans, and also recognised that her brand of counselling was particularly unique, and thus, pupils in her school were likely to have very different advice than if they were attending another school.

A further issue raised in relation to the experience of support was that of pupils from ethnic-minority backgrounds. The number of such pupils dropping out of upper secondary education was higher than in the rest of the population. This was because, in many schools, co-operation between parents and teachers needed to be improved. Parents might not know the Norwegian educational system, they might not receive the correct information because much of it is written, and some cultures do not expect to liaise with teachers. Some *rådgiver* address these difficulties by providing translations or interpreters in the mother tongue of the pupil and their family.

Improvements

In general, the Norwegians felt a more uniform system would be beneficial with more time and a weekly schedule rather than integration into the Norwegian and social science classes. Petter Arnesen, inspektør at ***Gulleråsen*** complained of the "vast differences" between schools that are currently experienced. Annette Furu also suggested that pupils should receive greater input about the nature of success and how that relates to their future choices. Finally, it was felt that there was, perhaps, insufficient information relating to the large number of vocational options open to pupils, particularly in Oslo where most courses are easily available.

Figure 21 Follow-Up Schedule

All follow-up interviews were carried out over the telephone. Telephone numbers were obtained during the original interview.

Pupil's name: **Tel No:**
School:
Date of original interview: **Date of follow-up:**
Original plans for the future:
Interview-Follow-up interval (months):

1. Introduction – who I am, purpose of study, when the original interview took place and, a request to ask them a few further questions.

Question – what have you been doing since I spoke with you?

Question – how does that relate to your original plans?

Question – how do you feel about that?

Question – would you change any of your choices if you had the chance?

Question – what are your plans for the future?

2. Specific details, eg, further details about parental education and employment.

3. Brief synopsis of findings to date if requested.

Appendix 16 – Frequencies of choice and decision-making in England and Norway

Table 64 Frequencies of choice and decision-making in England and Norway

Choices	Country	Categories of Decision-making						
		Restricted 24.35%	Aspirational 28.52%	Practical 10.96%	Coin-cidental 3.48%	Social 17.91%	Preferential 14.78%	TOTAL 100%
Staying On 17.04%	England	2.61	3.83	0.35	1.39	32.73	0.0	65
	Norway	2.61	1.91	0.17	0.35	0.7	0.0	33
School 35.48%	England	4.17	1.22	2.61	0.52	4.87	3.3	96
	Norway	4.17	4.87	4.17	0.35	4.52	0.7	108
Subjects 37.04%	England	3.13	8.52	1.74	0.35	1.91	6.26	126
	Norway	2.43	5.57	1.56	0.0	1.39	4.17	87
Qualifications 10.43%	England	2.26	1.74	0.17	0.52	0.52	0.35	32
	Norway	2.96	0.87	0.17	0.0	0.87	0.0	28
TOTAL		140	164	63	20	103	85	575

Note: These figures are derived from a numerical count of the choices and decisions outlined in the interview transcripts.

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